BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ASPHODEL

LONDON: J & R. MAXWELL

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ASPHODEL

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' 'AURORA FLOYD'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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ASPHODEL.

CHAPTER I.

'AND SHE WAS FAIR AS IS THE ROSE IN MAY.'

'OH, you glorious old Sol, how I love you!' cried Daphne.

It was a day on which common mortals were almost fainting with the heat, puffing and blowing and complaining—a blazing midsummer day; and even here, in the forest of Fontainebleau, where the mere idea of innumerable trees was suggestive of shadow and coolness, the heat was barely supportable—a heavy slumberous heat, loud with the hum of millions of insects, perfumed with the breath of a thousand pines.

Daphne revelled in the fierce sunshine—she threw back her crest of waving hair, bright as yellow gold, she smiled up at the cloudless blue, she looked unwinkingly even at Sol himself, the mighty unquenchable king of the sky, glorious yonder in his highest heaven.

She was lying at full length on a moss-grown block of stone at the top of a hill, which was one of the highest points in the forest, a hill-top overlooking on one side a fair sweep of champagne country, fertile valleys, church steeples, village roofs, vineyards and rose gardens, and winding streams; and on the other side, woodlands stretching away into infinite distance, darkly purple.

It was the choicest spot in a forest which, at its best, is a poor thing compared with the immemorial growth of an old English wood. Here there are no such oaks and beeches as our Hampshire forest can show—no such lovely mystical glades—no such richness of undergrowth. Everything seems of yesterday, save here and there a tree that looks as if he had seen something of bygone generations, and here and there a wreck of an ancient oak, proudly labelled 'The Great Pharamond,' or '*Le Chêne de Henri IV.*,' with a placard hung round his poor old neck to say that he is not to be damaged 'on pain of amend.' Such Pharamonds and Henris abound in the forest where Rufus was killed, and nobody heeds them. The owls build in them, the field-mice find shelter in them, the woodpecker taps at them, unscared by placards or the threat of an amend.

But in the Fontainebleau woods there are rocky glades which English forests cannot boast—wild walks between walls of gigantic granite boulders—queer shapes of monsters and animals in gray stone, which seem to leap out at one from the shadows as one passes ; innumerable pine-trees ; hills and hollows ; pathways carpeted with red fir-needles, mosses, ferns, and wild-flowers ; and a bluer brighter sky than the heaven which roofs an English landscape.

'Isn't this worlds better than Asnières?' asked Daphne of her companion ; 'and aren't you ever so grateful to those poor girls for catching scarlet-fever?'

Asnières was school and constraint, Fontainebleau was liberty ; so if the forest had been a poorer place, Daphne, who hated all restraints, would have loved it.

'Poor girls!' sighed Martha Dibb, a stupid, honest-minded young person, whose father kept an Italian warehouse in New Oxford-street, and whose mother had been seized with the aspiration to have her daughters finished at Continental schools ; whereby one Miss Dibb was being half-starved upon sausage and cabbage at Hanover, while the other grew fat upon *croûte au pot* and *bouilli* in the neighbourhood of Paris, and was supposed to be acquiring the true Parisian accent. 'Poor girls ; it was very bad for them,' sighed Martha.

'Yes ; but it was very good for us,' answered Daphne lightly ; 'and if it was a part of their destiny to have scarlet-fever, how very nice of them to have it in the term instead of in the holidays, when we shouldn't have profited by it.'

'And how lucky that we had that good-natured Miss Toby sent with us instead of one of the French governesses.'

'Lucky, indeed!' cried Daphne,with her bright laugh. 'That good simple Toby, with whom we can do exactly what we like, and who is the image of quiet contentment, so long as she has even the stupidest novel to read, and some acid-drops to suck. I tremble when I think of the amount of acid-drops she must consume in the course of a year.'

'Why do you give her so many?' asked the practical Martha.

'They are my peace-offerings when I have been especially troublesome,' said Daphne, with the air of a sinner who gloried in her troublesomeness. 'Poor dear old Toby! if I were to give her a block of sweetstuff as tall as King Cheops's pyramid, it wouldn't atone for the life I lead her.

'I hope she won't get into trouble with Madame for letting us run wild like this,' suggested Miss Dibb doubtfully.

'How should Madame know anything about it? And do you think she would care a straw if she did?' retorted Daphne. 'She will get paid exactly the same for us whether we are roaming at large in this lovely old forest, or grinding at grammar, and analysis, and Racine, and Lafontaine in the stuffy schoolroom at

Asnières, where the train goes shrieking over the bridge every half hour carrying happy people to Paris and gaiety, and theatres and operas, and all the good things of this life. What does Madame Tchinache care, so long as we are out of mischief? And I don't see how we can get into any mischief here, unless that lovely green lizard we saw darting up the gray rock just now should turn into an adder and sting us to death.'

'If Miss Toby hadn't a headache we couldn't have come out without her,' said Martha musingly.

'May Toby and her headache flourish! If she had been well enough to come with us we should have been crawling along the dusty white road at the edge of the forest, and should never have got here. Toby has corns. And now I am going to sketch,' said Daphne in an authoritative tone. 'You can do your crochet: for I really suppose now that to you and a certain class of intellects there is a kind of pleasure to be derived from poking an ivory hook into a loop of berlin wool and pulling it out again. But please sit so that I can't see your work, Dibb dear. The very look of that fluffy wool on this hot day almost suffocates me.'

Daphne produced her drawing-block and opened her colour-box, and settled herself in a half-recumbent position on the great granite slab, and surveyed the wide landscape below her with that gaze of calm patronage which the amateur artist bestows on grand, illimitable, untranslatable Nature. She looked across the vast valley, with its silver streak of river and its distant spires, its ever varying lights and shadows—a scene which Turner would have contemplated with awe and a sense of comparative impotence; but which ignorance, as personified by Daphne, surveyed complacently, wondering where she should begin.

'I think it will make a pretty picture,' she said, 'if I can succeed with it.'

'Why don't you do a tree, or a cottage, or something, as the drawing-master said we ought to do—just one simple little thing that one could draw correctly?' asked Martha, who was provokingly well furnished with the aggravating quality of commonsense.

'Drawing masters are such grovellers,' said Daphne, dashing in a faint outline with her facile pencil. 'I would rather go on making splendid failures all my life than creep along the dull path of mediocre merit by the lines and rules of a drawing-master. I have no doubt this is going to be a splendid failure, and I shall do a devil's dance upon it presently, as Müller used in the woods near Bristol, when he couldn't please himself. But it amuses one for the moment,' concluded Daphne, with whom life was all in the present, and self the centre of the universe.

She splashed away at her sky with her biggest brush, sweep-

ing across from left to right with a wash of cobalt, and then began to edge off the colour into ragged little clouds as the despised drawing-master had taught her. There was not a cloud in the hot blue sky this midsummer afternoon, and Daphne's treatment was purely conventional.

And now she began her landscape, and tried with multitudinous dabs of gray, and green, and blue, Indian red, and Italian pink, ochre, and umber, and lake, and sienna, to imitate the glory of a fertile valley basking in the sun.

The colours were beginning to get into confusion. The foreground and the distance were all on one plane, and Daphne was on the point of flinging her block on the red sandy ground, and indulging in the luxury of a demon-dance upon her unsuccessful effort, when a voice behind her murmured quietly: 'Give your background a wash of light gray, and fetch up your middle-distance with a little body colour.'

'Thanks awfully,' replied Daphne without looking round, and without the faintest indication of surprise. Painters in the forest were almost as common as gadflies. They seemed indigenous to the soil. 'Shall I make my pine-trunks umber or Venetian red?'

'Neither,' answered the unseen adviser. 'Those tall pine-stems are madder-brown, except where the shadows tint them with purple.'

'You are exceedingly kind,' said Daphne, stifling a yawn, 'but I don't think I'll go on with it. I am so obviously in a mess; I suppose nobody but a Turner ought to attempt such a valley as that.'

'Perhaps not. Linnell or Vicat Cole might be able to give a faint idea of it.'

'Linnell!' exclaimed Daphne. 'I thought he painted nothing but wheat-fields, and that his only idea of Nature was a blaze of yellow.'

'Have you seen many of his pictures?'

'One. I was taken to the Academy last year.'

'Were you very pleased with what you saw?'

'Delighted—with the gowns and bonnets. It was a Saturday afternoon in the height of the season, and I plead guilty to seeing very little of the pictures. There were always people in the way, and the people were ever so much more interesting than the paintings.'

'What picture can compare with a well-made gown or the latest invention in bonnets?' exclaimed the unknown with good-humoured irony.

Daphne hacked the spoiled sheet off her block with a dainty little penknife, and looked at the daub longingly, wishing that the stranger would depart and leave her free to execute a *pas seul* upon her abortive effort. But the stranger seemed to have

no idea of departure. He had evidently settled himself behind her, on a camp-stool, or a rock, or some kind of seat; and he meant to stay.

She had not yet seen his face. She liked his voice, which was of the baritone order, full, and round, and grave, and his intonation was that of a man who had lived in what the world calls Society. It might not be the best possible intonation—since orators and great preachers and successful actors have another style—but it was the tone approved by the best people, and the only tone that Daphne liked.

'A drawing-master, no doubt,' she thought, 'whose manners have been formed in decent society.'

She wiped her brushes and shut her colour-box, with languid deliberation, not yet feeling curious enough to turn and inspect the stranger, although Martha Dibb was staring at him open-mouthed, as still as a stone, and the image of astonishment. Daphne augured from that gaping mouth of Martha's that the unknown must be somewhat eccentric in appearance or attire, and began to feel faintly inquisitive.

She rose from her recumbent attitude on the rock, drew herself as straight as an arrow, shook out her indigo-coloured serge petticoat, from beneath whose hem flashed a pair of scarlet stockings and neat buckled shoes, shook loose her mane of golden-bright hair, and looked deliberately round at Nature generally—the woods, the rocks, the brigand's cave yonder, and the stalls where toys and trifles in carved wood were set out to tempt the tourist—and finally at the stranger. He lounged at his ease on a neighbouring rock, looking up at her with a provokingly self-assured expression. Her supposition had been correct, she told herself. He evidently belonged to the artistic classes—a drawing-master, or a third-rate water-colour painter—a man whose little bits of landscape or foreign architecture would be hung near the floor, and priced at a few guineas in the official list. He was a Bohemian to the tips of his nails. He wore an old velveteen coat—Daphne was not experienced enough to know that it had been cut by a genius among tailors—a shabby felt hat lay on the grass beside him; every one of his garments had seen good service, even to the boots, whose neat shape indicated a refinement that struggled against adverse circumstances. He was young, tall, and slim, with long slender fingers, and hands that looked artistic without looking effeminate. He had dark brown hair cut close to a well-shaped head, a dark brown moustache shading a sensitive and somewhat melancholy mouth. His complexion was pale, inclining to sallowness, his nose well formed, his forehead broad and low. His eyes were of so peculiar a colour that Daphne was at first sorely perplexed as to whether they were brown or blue, and finally came to the conclusion that they were neither colour, but a variable greenish-gray. But whatever their

hue she was fain to admit to herself that the eyes were handsome eyes—far too good for the man's position. Something of their beauty was doubtless owing to the thick dark lashes, the strongly marked brows. Just now the eyes, after a brief upward glance at Daphne, who fairly merited a longer regard, were fixed dreamily on the soft dream-like landscape—the sun-steeped valley, the purple distance. It was a day for languorous dreaming; a day in which the world-worn soul might slip off the fetters of reality and roam at large in shadowland.

'Dibb,' said Daphne, ever so slightly piqued at the unknown's absent air, 'don't you think we ought to be going home? Poor dear Miss Toby will be anxious.'

'Not before six o'clock,' replied the matter-of-fact Martha. 'You told her with your own lips that she wasn't to expect us before six. And what was the good of our carrying that heavy basket if we are not to eat our dinner here?'

'You have brought your dinner!' exclaimed the stranger, suddenly waking from his dream. 'How very delightful! Let us improvise a picnic.'

'The poor thing is hungry,' thought Daphne, rather disappointed at what she considered a low trait in his character.

Martha, with her face addressed to Daphne, began to distort her countenance in the most frightful manner, mutely protesting against the impropriety of sharing their meal with an unknown wanderer. Daphne, who was as mischievous as Robin Goodfellow, and doated on everything that was wrong, laughed these dumb appeals to scorn.

'The poor thing shall be fed,' she said to herself. 'Perhaps he has hardly a penny in his pockets. It will be a pleasure to give him a good meal and send him on his way rejoicing. I shall feel as meritorious as the Good Samaritan.'

'Is this the basket?' asked the painter, pouncing upon the beehive receptacle which Martha had been hugging for the last five minutes. 'Do let me be useful. I have a genius for picnics.'

'I never heard of such impertinence!' ejaculated Miss Dibb inwardly; and then she began to wonder whether the valuable watch and chain which her father had given her on her last birthday were safe in such company, or whether her earrings might not be suddenly wrenched out of her ears.

And there was that reckless Daphne, who had not the faintest notion of propriety, entering into the thing eagerly as a capital joke, and making herself as much at home with the nameless intruder as if she had known him all her life.

Miss Dibb had been Daphne's devoted slave for the last two years, had admired her and believed in her, and fetched and carried for her, and had been landed in all manner of scrapes and difficulties by her without a murmur; but she had never

been so near revolt as at this moment, when her deep-rooted, thoroughly British sense of propriety was outraged as it had never in all Daphne's escapades been outraged before. A strange man, fairly well-mannered it is true, but stubbly-clad, was to be allowed to hob and nob in a place of public resort with two of Madame Tolmache's young ladies.

Martha looked despairingly round, as if to see that help was nigh. They were not alone in the forest. This hill side at the top of the rocky wall, was a favourite resort. There were stalls for toys and stalls for refreshments close at hand. There were half-a-dozen groups of idle people enjoying themselves under the tall pines and in the shadow of the big blue-gray rocks. The mother of one estimable family had taken off her boots, and was lying at full length, with her stockings exposed to the libertine gaze of passers-by. Some were eating, some were sleeping. Children with cropped heads, short petticoats, and a great deal of stocking, were flying gaudy-coloured air-balls, and screaming at each other as only French children can scream. There was not the stillness of a dense primeval wood, the awful solitude of the Great Dismal Swamp. The place was rather like a bit of Greenwich Park or Hampstead Heath on a comparatively quiet afternoon in the middle of the week.

Miss Dibb took heart of grace, and decided that her watch and earrings were safe. It was only her character that was likely to suffer. Daphne was dancing about among the rocks all this time, spreading a damask napkin on a smooth slab of granite, and making the most of the dinner. Her red stockings flashed to and fro like fireflies. She had a scarlet ribbon round her neck, and the dark serge gown was kept up the back with a scarlet cord, and, with her feathery hair flying loose and glittering in the sun, she was as bright a figure as ever lit up the foreground of a forest scene.

The unknown began to be awful, and sat on his granite bench lazily contemplating her as she completed her preparations.

'What an idle person you are!' she exclaimed, looking up from her task. 'Tumbler!'

He explored the basket and produced the required article.

'Thanks. Corkscrew! Don't run away with the idea that you are going to have wine. The corkscrew is for our lemonade.'

'You needn't put such a selfish emphasis on the possessive pronoun,' said the stranger. 'I mean to have some of that lemonade.'

Daphne surveyed the banquet critically, with her head on one side. It was not a stupendous meal for two hungry schoolgirls and an unknown pedestrian, whom Daphne supposed to have been on short commons for the last week or two. There was half a roasted fowl—a fowl who in his zenith had no claim

to be considered a fine specimen, and who seemed to have fallen upon evil days before he was sacrificed, so gaunt was his leg, so shrunken his wing, so withered his breast; there were some thin slices of carmine ham, with a bread-crumby edge instead of fat. Of one thing there was abundance, and that was the staff of life. Two long brown loaves—the genuine *pain de ménage*—suggested a homely kind of plenty. For dessert there was a basket of wood-strawberries, a thin slab of Gruyère, and some small specimens of high-art confectionery, more attractive to the eye than the palate.

'Now, Dibb dear, grace, if you please,' commanded Daphne, with a mischievous side-glance at the unknown.

That French grace of poor Martha's was a performance which always delighted Daphne, and she wanted the wayfarer to enjoy himself. The 'ongs' and 'dongs' were worth hearing. Gravely the submissive Martha complied, and with solemn countenance asked a blessing on the meal.

'You can have all the fowl,' said Daphne to her guest; 'Martha and I like bread and cheese ever so much better.'

She tore one of the big brown loaves in two, tossed one half to Martha, and broke a great knob off the other for her own eating, attacking it ravenously with her strong white teeth.

'You are more than good,' replied the stranger with his pleasantly listless air, as if there were nothing in life worth being energetic about; 'you are actually self-sacrificing. But, to tell you the honest truth, I have not the slightest appetite. I had my second breakfast at one o'clock, and I had much rather carve that elderly member of the feathered tribe for you than eat him. I wish he were better worthy of your consideration.'

Daphne looked at him doubtfully, unconvinced.

'I know you're disparaging the bird out of kindness to us,' she said; 'you might just as well eat a good luncheon. Martha and I adore bread and cheese.'

She emphasised this assertion with a stealthy frown at poor Miss Dibb, who saw her dinner thus coolly confiscated for the good of a suspicious-looking interloper.

'You doat upon Gruyère, don't you, Martha?' she demanded.

'I like it pretty well,' answered Miss Dibb sulkily; 'but I think the holes are the nicest part.'

The stranger was cutting up the meagre fowl, giving the wing and breast to Daphne, the sinewy leg to Martha, who was the kind of girl to go through life getting the legs of fowls and the back seat in opera-boxes, and the worst partners at afternoon dances.

Finding the unknown inflexible, and being herself desperately hungry, Daphne ended by taking her share of the poultry, while her guest ate a few strawberries and munched a crust of bread, lying along the grass all the while, almost at her feet. It was a

new experience, and the more horrified Martha looked the more Daphne enjoyed it.

What was life to her but the present hour, with its radiant sun and glad earth flushed with colour, the scent of the pines, the hum of the bees, the delight of the butterflies flashing across the blue? Utterly innocent in her utter ignorance of evil, she saw no snare in such simple joys, she had no premonition of danger. Her worst suspicion of the stranger was that he might be poor. That was the only social crime whereof she knew. And the more convinced she felt of his poverty, the more determined she was to be civil to him.

He lay at her feet, on a carpet of fir-needles, looking up at her with an admiration almost as purely artistic as that which he had felt an hour ago for a green and purple lizard which he had caught asleep on one of the rocks, and which had darted up a sheer wall of granite, swift as a sun-ray, at the light touch of his finger-tip. With a love of the beautiful almost as abstract as that which he had felt for the graceful curves and rainbow tints of the lizard, he lay and basked in the light of this schoolgirl's violet eyes, and watched the play of sunbeam and shadow on her golden hair. To him, too, the present hour was all in all —an hour of sunlight and perfume and balmiest atmosphere, an hour's sweet idleness, empty of thought and care.

The face he looked at was not one of those perfect faces which would bear to be transfixed in marble. It was a countenance whose chief beauty lay in colour and expression—a face full of variety; now whimsically gay, now pouting, now pert; anon suddenly pensive. Infinitely bewitching in some phases, it was infinitely provoking in others; but, under all conditions, it was a face full of interest.

The complexion was brilliant, the true English red and white; no ivory-pale beauty this, with the sickly tints of Gibson's painted Venus, but the creamy fairness and the vivid rose of health, and youth, and happiness. The eyes were of darkest gray, that deep violet which, under thick dark lashes, looks black as night. The nose was short and *retroussé*, nothing to boast of in noses; the mouth was a trifle wide, but the lips were of loveliest form and richest carmine, the teeth flashing beneath them absolutely perfect. Above those violet eyes arched strongly-marked brows of darkest brown, contrasting curiously with the thick fringe of golden hair. Altogether the face was more original in its beauty than any which the stranger had looked upon for a long time.

'Have you any sketches to show us?' asked Daphne when she had finished her dinner.

'No; I have not been sketching this morning; and if I had done anything I doubt if it would have been worth looking at. You must not suppose that I am a great artist. But if you

don't mind lending me your block and your colour-box for half an hour I should like to make a little sketch now.'

'Cool,' thought Daphne. 'But calm impudence is this gentleman's leading characteristic.'

She handed him block and box with an amused smile.

'Are you going to paint the valley?' she asked.

'No; I leave that for a new Turner. I am only going to try my hand at a rock with a young lady sitting on it.'

'I'm sure Martha won't mind being painted,' replied Daphne, with a mischievous glance at Miss Dibb, who was sitting bolt upright on her particular block of granite, the image of stiffness and dumb disapproval. She was a thick-set girl with sandy hair and freckles, not bad-looking after her homely fashion, but utterly wanting in grace.

'I couldn't think of taking such a liberty with Miss Martha,' returned the stranger; 'the freemasonry of art puts me at my ease with you. Would you mind sitting quiet for half an hour or so? That semi-recumbent position will do beautifully.'

He sketched in rock and figure as he spoke, with a free facile touch that showed a practised hand.

'I'm sure you can paint beautifully,' said Daphne, watching his pencil as he sat a little way off, glancing up at her every now and then.

'Wait till you see how I shall interpret your lilies and roses. I ought to be as good a colourist as Rubens or John Phillip to do you justice.'

She had fallen into a reposeful attitude after finishing her meal, her arms folded on the rock, her head resting on the folded arms, her eyes gazing sleepily at the sunlit valley in front of her, one little foot pendent from the edge of the greenish gray stone, the other tucked under her dark blue skirt, a mass of yellow tresses falling over one dark blue shoulder, and a scarlet ribbon fluttering on the other.

Martha Dibb looked more and more horrified. Could there be a lower deep than this? To sit for one's portrait to an unknown artist in a shabby coat. The man was unquestionably a vagabond, although he did not make havoc of his aspirates like poor dear papa; and Daphne was bringing disgrace on Madame Tolmache's whole establishment.

'Suppose I should meet him in Regent Street one day after I leave school, and he were to speak to me, what would mamma and Jane say?' thought Miss Dibb.

CHAPTER II.

'AND THIS WAS GLADLY IN THE EVENTIDE.'

DAPHNE was as as still as a statue, her vanity gratified by this homage to her charms. There had been nobody to admire her at Asnières but the old music-master, into whose hat she had sometimes put a little bouquet from the trim suburban garden, or a spray of acacia from the grove that screened the maiden meditations of Madame Tolmache's pupils from the vulgar gaze of the outside world. She retained her recumbent attitude patiently for nearly an hour, half asleep in the balmy afternoon atmosphere, while the outraged Martha sat on her rock apart, digging her everlasting crochet-hook into the fluffy mass of wool, and saying never a word.

The stranger was nearly as silent as Martha. He was working industriously at his sketch, and smoking his cigar as he worked, having first ascertained that the ladies were tolerant of the weed. He painted in a large dashing style that got over the ground very quickly, and made a good effect. He had nearly finished his sketch of the figure on the rock—the indigo gown, scarlet ribbon, bright hair, and dark luminous eyes, when Daphne jumped up suddenly, and vowed that her every limb was an agony to her.

'I couldn't endure it an instant longer!' she exclaimed. 'I hope you've finished.'

'Not quite; but you may change your attitude as much as you like if you'll only keep your head the same way. I am working at the face now.'

'What are you going to do with the picture when it's finished?'

'Keep it till my dying day.'

'I thought you would perhaps give it—I mean sell it—to me. I could not afford a large price, for my people are very poor, but——'

'Your looking-glass will show you a better portrait than this poor sketch of mine. And, in after years, even this libellous daub will serve to remind me of a happy hour in my life.'

'I am glad you have enjoyed yourself,' said Daphne; 'but I really wish you had eaten that fowl. Have you far to go home to dinner?'

'Only to Fontainebleau.'

'You are living there?'

'I am staying there. I may strike my tent and be across the Jura to-morrow night. I never live anywhere.'

'But haven't you a home and people?'

'I have a kind of home, but no people.'

'Poor fellow!' murmured Daphne, with exquisite compassion. 'Are you an orphan?'

'Yes; my father died nine years ago, my mother last year.'

'How awfully sad! No brothers or sisters?'

'None. I am a crystallisation, the last of a vanishing race. And now I have done as much as I dare to your portrait. Any attempt at finish would result in failure. I am writing the place and the date in the corner of my sketch. May I write your name?'

'My name!' exclaimed Daphne, her eyes sparkling with mischief, her cheeks curving into dimples.

'Yes; your name. You have a name, I suppose: unless you are the nameless spirit of sunlit woodlands, masquerading in a blue gown?'

'My name—is—Poppæa,' faltered Daphne, whose latest chapter of Roman history had been the story of Nero and his various crimes, toned down and expurgated to suit young ladies' schools.

Poppæa Sabina, thus chastely handled, had appeared nothing worse than a dressy lady of extravagant tastes, who took elaborate care of her complexion, and had a fancy for shoeing her mules with gold.

'Did you say Poppet?' inquired the stranger.

'No; Poppæa. You must have heard the name before, I should think. It is a Roman name. My father is a great classical scholar, and he chose it for me. And pray what is your name?'

'Nero.'

The stranger pronounced the word without moving a muscle of his face, still intent upon his sketch; for it is vain for a man to say he has finished a thing of that kind; so long as his brushes are within reach, he will be putting in new touches. There was not a twinkle in those dubious eyes of his—not an upward move of those mobile lips. He was as grave as a judge.

'I don't believe it!' cried Daphne, bouncing up from her rock.

'Don't believe what?'

'That your name is Nero.'

'Why not? Have I not as good a right to bear a Roman name as you have? Suppose I had a classical father as well as you. Why not?'

'It is too absurd.'

'Many things are absurd which yet are absolutely true.'

'And you are really called Nero?'

'As really as you are called Poppæa.'

'It is so dreadfully like a dog's name.'

'It is a dog's name. But you may call your dog Bill, or Joe, or Paul, or Peter. I don't think that makes any difference. I would sooner have some dogs for my namesakes than some men.'

'Dibb, dear,' said Daphne, turning sharply upon the victim of her folly, the long-suffering, patient Martha. 'What's the time?'

She had a watch of her own, a neat little gold hunter; but

it was rarely in going order for two consecutive days, and she was generally dependent on the methodical Dibb for all information as to the flight of time.

'A quarter to five.'

'Then we must be going home instantly. How could you let me stay so long, you foolish girl? I am sure it must be more than an hour's walk to the town, and we promised poor dear Toby to be home by six.'

'It isn't my fault,' remarked Miss Dibb; 'I should have been glad to go ever so long ago, if you had thought fit.'

'Hurry up, then, Dibb dear. Put away your crochet. Have you quite done with my block?' to the unknown. 'Thank you muchly. And now my box? Those go into the basket. Thanks, awfully,' as he helped her to pack the tumblers, corkscrew, plates, and knives, which had served for their primitive repast. 'And now we will wish you good-day—Mr.—Nero.'

'On no account. I am going to carry that basket back to Fontainebleau for you.'

'All along that dusty high road. We couldn't think of such a thing; could we, Martha?'

'I don't know that my opinion is of much account,' said Martha stiffly.

'Don't, you dear creature!' cried Daphne, darting at her, and hugging her affectionately. 'Don't try to be ill-tempered, for you can't do it. The thing is an ignominious failure. You were created to be good-natured, and nice, and devoted—especially to me.'

'You know how fond I am of you,' murmured Martha reproachfully; 'and you take a mean advantage of me when you go on so.'

'How am I going on? Is it very dreadful to let a gentleman carry a heavy basket for me?'

'A gentleman!' muttered Martha, with a supercilious glance at the stranger's well-worn velveteen.

He was standing a little way off, out of hearing, taking a last long look at the valley.

'Yes; and every inch a gentleman, though his coat is shabby, and though he may be as poor as Job, and though he makes game of me!' protested Daphne with conviction.

'Have your own way,' replied Martha.

'I generally do,' answered Daphne.

And so they went slowly winding downhill in the westering sunshine, all among the gray rocks on which the purple shadows were deepening, the warm umber lights glowing, while the rosy evening light came creeping up in the distant west, and the voice of an occasional bird, so rare in this Gallic wood, took a vesper sound in the summer stillness.

The holiday makers had all gone home. The French matron

who had taken her rest so luxuriously, surrounded by her olive-branches, had put on her boots and departed. The women who sold cakes and fruit, and wooden paper-knives, had packed up their wares and gone away. All was silence and loneliness ; and for a little while Daphne and her companions wandered on in quiet enjoyment of the scene and the atmosphere, treading the mossy, sandy path that wound in and out among the big rocks, sometimes nearly losing themselves, and anon following the blue arrow points which a careful hand had painted on the rocks to show them which way they should go.

But Daphne was not given to silence. She found something to talk about before they had gone very far.

'You have travelled immensely, I suppose ?' she said to the stranger.

'I don't know exactly what significance you attach to the word. Young ladies use such large words nowadays for such very small things. From a scientific explorer's point of view, my wanderings have been very limited, but I daresay one of Cook's tourists would consider me a respectable traveller. I have never seen the buried cities of Central America, nor surveyed the world from the top of Mount Everest, nor even climbed the Caucasus, nor wandered by stormy Hydaspes : but I have done Egypt, and Algeria, and Greece, and all that is tolerably worth seeing in Southern Europe, and have tried my hand, or rather my legs, at Alpine climbing, and have come to the conclusion that, although Nature is mountainous, life is everywhere more or less flat, stale, and unprofitable.'

'I'm sure I shouldn't feel that if I were free to roam the world, and could paint as sweetly as you do.'

'I had a sweet subject, remember.'

'Please don't,' cried Daphne ; 'I rather like you when you are rude, but if you flatter I shall hate you.'

'Then I'll be rude. To win your liking I would be more uncivil than Petruchio.'

'Katharine was a fool !' exclaimed Daphne, skipping up the craggy side of one of the biggest rocks. 'I have always despised her. To begin so well, and end so tamely.'

'If you don't take care you'll end by slipping off that rock, and spraining an ankle or two,' said Nero warningly.

'Not I,' answered Daphne confidently ; 'you don't know how used I am to climbing. Oh, look at that too delicious lizard !'

She was on her knees admiring the emerald-hued changeful creature. She touched it only with her breath, and it flashed away from her and vanished in some crevice of the rock.

'Silly thing, did it think I wanted to hurt it, when I was only worshipping its beauty ?' she cried.

Then she rose suddenly, and stood on the rock, a slim girlish

figure, with fluttering drapery, poised as lightly as Mercury, gazing round her, admiring the tall slim stems of the beeches growing in groups like clustered columns, the long vista of rocks, the dark wall of fir-trees, mounting up and up to the edge of a saffron-tinted sky—for these loiterers had lost count of time since steady-going Martha looked at her reliable watch, and the last of the finches had sung his lullaby to his wife and family, and the golden ship called Sol had gone down to Night's dark sea.

'Come down, you absurd creature!' exclaimed Nero, with a peremptory voice, winding one arm about the light figure, and lifting the girl off the rock as easily as if she had been a feather-weight.

'You are very horrid!' protested Daphne indignantly. 'You are ever so much ruder than Petruchio. Why shouldn't I stand on that rock? I was only admiring the landscape!'

'No doubt, and two minutes hence you would be calling upon us to admire a fine example of a sprained ankle.'

'I'm sure if your namesake was ever as unkind to my namesake, it's no wonder she died young,' said Daphne, pouting.

'I believe he was occasionally a little rough upon her,' answered the artist with his imperturbable air. 'But of course you have read your Tacitus and your Suetonius in the original. Young ladies know everything nowadays.'

'The Roman history we read is by a clergyman, written expressly for ladies' schools,' said Miss Dibb demurely.

'How intensely graphic and interesting that chronicle must be!' retorted the stranger.

They had come to the end of the winding path among the rocks by this time, and were in a long, straight road, cut through the heart of the forest, between tall trees that seemed to have outgrown their strength—weedy-looking trees, planted too thickly, and only able to push their feeble growth up towards the sun, with no room for spreading boughs or interlacing roots. The evening light was growing grave and gray. Bats were skimming across the path, uncomfortably near Daphne's flowing hair. Miss Dibb began to grumble.

'How dreadfully we have loitered!' she cried, looking at her watch. 'It is nearly eight, and we have so far to go. What will Miss Toby say?'

'Well, she will moan a little, no doubt,' answered Daphne lightly, 'and will tell us that her heart has been in her mouth for the last hour, which need not distress us much, as we know it's a physical impossibility; and that anyone might knock her down with a feather—another obvious impossibility, seeing that poor Toby weighs eleven stone—and then I shall kiss her and make much of her, and give her the packet of nougat I mean to buy on the way home, and all will be sunshine. She takes a sticky delight in nougat. And now please talk and amuse us,' said

Daphne, turning to the artist with an authoritative air. 'Tell us about some of your travels, or tell us where you live when you're at home.'

'I think I'd rather talk of my travels. I've just come from Italy.'

'Where you have been painting prodigiously, of course. It is a land of pictures, is it not?'

'Yes; but Nature's pictures are even better than the treasures of art.'

'If ever I should marry,' said Daphne with a dreamy look, as if she were contemplating an event far off in the dimness of twenty years hence, 'I should insist upon my husband taking me to Italy.'

'Perhaps he wouldn't be able to afford the expense,' suggested the practical Martha.

'Then I wouldn't marry him,' Daphne retorted decisively.

'Isn't that rather a mercenary notion?' asked the gentleman with the basket.

'Not at all. Do you suppose I should marry just for the sake of having a husband? If ever I do marry—which I think is more than doubtful—it will be, first and foremost, in order that I may do everything I wish to do, and have everything I want to have. Is there anything singular in that?'

'No; I suppose it is a young beauty's innate idea of marriage. She sees herself in a glass, and recognises perfection, and knows her own value.'

'Are you married?' asked Daphne abruptly, eager to change the conversation when the stranger became complimentary.

'No.'

'Engaged?'

'Yes.'

'What is she like?' inquired Daphne eagerly. 'Please tell us about her. It will be ever so much more interesting than Italy; for, after all, when one hasn't seen a country description goes for so little. What is she like?'

'I could best answer that question in one word if I were to say she is perfection.'

'You called me perfection just now,' said Daphne pettishly.

'I was talking of your face. She is perfection in all things. Perfectly pure, and true, and good, and noble. She is handsome, highly accomplished, rich.'

'And yet you go wandering about the world in that coat,' exclaimed Daphne, too impulsive to be polite.

'It is shabby, is it not? But if you knew how comfortable it is you wouldn't wonder that I have an affection for it.'

'Go on about the young lady, please. Have you been long engaged to her?'

'Ever since I can remember, in my heart of hearts: she was

my bright particular star when I was a boy at school: she was my sole incentive to work, or decent behaviour, when I was at the University. And now I am not going to say any more about her. I think I have told you enough to gratify any reasonable curiosity. Ask me conundrums, young ladies, if you please, or do something to amuse me. Remember, I am carrying the basket, and a man is something more than a beast of burden. My mind requires relaxation.'

Martha Dibb grinned all over broad frank face. Riddles were her delight. She had little manuscript books filled with them in her scrawly, pointed writing. She began at once, like a musical-box that has been wound up, and did not leave off asking conundrums till they were half-way down the long street leading to the palace, near which Miss Toby and her pupils had their lodging.

But Daphne had no intention that the stranger should learn exactly where she lived. Reckless as she was, mirthful and mischievous as Puck or Robin Goodfellow, she had still a dim idea that her conduct was not exactly correct, or would not be correct in England. On the Continent, of course, there must be a certain license. English travellers dined at public tables, and gamed in public rooms—were altogether more sociable and open to approach than on their native soil. It was only a chosen few—the peculiarly gifted in stiffness—who retained their glacial crust through every change of scene and climate, and who would perish rather than cross the street ungloved, or discourse familiarly with an unaccredited stranger. But, even with due allowance for Continental laxity, Daphne felt that she had gone a little too far. So she pulled up suddenly at the corner of a side street, and demanded her basket.

'What does that mean?' asked the painter, with a look of lazy surprise.

'Only that this is our way home, and that we won't trouble you to carry the basket any further, thanks intensely.'

'But I am going to carry it to your door.'

'It's awfully good of you to propose it, but our governess would be angry with us for imposing on the kindness of a stranger, and I am afraid we should get into trouble.'

'Then I haven't a word to say,' answered the painter, smiling at her blushing eloquent face. Verily a speaking face—beautiful just as a sunlit meadow is beautiful, because of the lights and shadows that flit and play perpetually across it.

'Do you live in this street?' he asked.

'No; our house is in the second turning to the right, seven doors from the corner,' said Daphne, who had obtained possession of the basket. 'Good-bye.'

She ran off with light swift foot, followed lumpishly and breathlessly by the scandalised Martha.

'Daphne, how could you tell him such an outrageous story?' she exclaimed.

'Do you think I was going to tell him the truth?' asked Daphne, still fluttering on, light as a lapwing. 'We should have had him calling on Miss Toby to-morrow morning to ask if we were fatigued by our walk, or perhaps singing the serenade from Don Giovanni under our windows to-night. Now, Martha dearest, don't say one word; I know I have behaved shamefully, but it has been awful fun, hasn't it?'

'I'm sure I felt ready to sink through the ground all the time,' panted Martha.

'Darling, the ground and you are both too solid for there to be any fear of that.'

They had turned a corner by this time, and doubling and winding, always at a run, they came very speedily to the quiet spot near the palace, where their governess had lodged them in a low blind-looking white house, with only one window that commanded a view of the street.

They had been so fleet of foot, and had so doubled on the unknown, that, from this upper window, they had presently the satisfaction of seeing him come sauntering along the empty street, careless, indifferent, with dreamy eyes looking forward into vacancy, a man without a care.

'He doesn't look as if he minded our having given him the slip one little bit,' said Daphne.

'Why should he?' asked the matter-of-fact Martha. 'I daresay he was tired of carrying the basket.'

'Go your ways,' said Daphne with a faint sigh, waving her hand at the vanishing figure. 'Go your ways over mountain and sea, through wood and valley. This world is a big place, and it isn't likely you and I will ever meet again.' Then, turning to her companion with a sudden change of manner, she exclaimed: 'Martha, I believe we have both made a monstrous mistake.'

'As how?' asked Miss Dibb stupidly.

'In taking him for a poor artist.'

'He looks like one.'

'Not he. There is nothing about him but his coat that looks poor, and he wears that as if it were purple and ermine. Did you notice his eye when he ordered us to change the conversation, an eye accustomed to look at inferiors? And there is a careless pride in his manner, like a man who believes that the world was made on purpose for him, yet doesn't want to make any fuss about it. Then he is engaged to a rich lady, and he has been at a university. No, Martha, I am sure he is no wandering artist living on his pencil.'

'Then he must think all the worse of us,' said Martha, solemnly.

'What does it matter?' asked Daphne, with a careless shrug. 'We have seen the last of each other.'

'We can never be sure of that. One might meet him at a party.'

'I don't think you will,' said Daphne, faintly supercilious, 'and the chances are ever so many to one against even my meeting him anywhere.'

Here Miss Toby burst into the room. She had been lying down in an adjacent chamber, resting her poor bilious head, when the girls came softly in, and had only just heard their voices.

'Oh, you dreadful girls, what hours of torture you have caused me!' she exclaimed. 'I thought something must have happened.'

'Something did happen,' said Daphne; whereupon Martha thought she was going to confess everything.

'What?'

'A lizard.'

'Did it sting you?'

'No: it darted away when I looked at it. A lovely glittering green thing. I wish I could tame one and wear it for a necklace. And I nearly fell off a rock; and I tried hard to paint the valley, and made a most dismal failure. But the view from the hill is positively delicious, Toby dear, and the rocks are wonderful; huge masses of granite tumbled about among the trees anyhow, as if Titans had been pelting one another. It's altogether lovely. You must go with us to-morrow, Toby love.'

Miss Toby, diverted from her intention to scold, shook her head despondingly.

'I should like it of all things,' she sighed. 'But I am such a bad walker, and the heat always affects my head. Besides, I think we ought to go over the palace to-morrow. There is so much instruction to be derived from a place so full of historical associations.'

'No doubt,' answered the flippant Daphne, 'though if you were to tell me that it had been built by Julius Cæsar or Alfred the Great, I should hardly be wise enough to contradict you.'

'My dear Daphne, after you have been so carefully grounded in history,' remonstrated Miss Toby.

'I know, dear; but then you see I have never built anything on the ground. It's all very well to dig out foundations, but if one never gets any further than that! But we'll see the palace to-morrow, and you shall teach me no end of history while we are looking at pictures and things.'

'If my poor head be well enough,' sighed Miss Toby, and then she began to move languidly to and fro, arranging for the refreshment of her pupils, who wanted their supper.

When the supper was ready, Daphne could eat nothing

although five minutes before she had declared herself ravenous. She was too excited to eat. She talked of the forest, the view, the heat, the sky, everything except the stranger, and his name was trembling on her lips perpetually. Every now and then she pulled herself up abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and flashed a vivid glance at stolid Martha, her dark gray eyes shining like stars, full of mischievous light. She would have liked to tell Miss Toby everything, but to do so might be to surrender all future liberty. Headache or no headache, the honest little governess would never have allowed her pupils to wander about alone again, could she have beheld them, in her mind's eye, picnicking with a nameless stranger.

There was a little bit of garden at the back of the low, white house, hardly more than a green courtyard, with a square grass plot and a few shrubs, into which enclosure the windows all looked, save that one peep-hole towards the street. Above the white wall that shut in the bit of green rose the foliage of a much larger garden—acacias shedding their delicate perfume on the cool night, limes just breaking into flower, dark-leaved magnolias, tulip-trees, birch and aspen—a lovely variety of verdure. And over all this shone the broad disk of a ripening moon, flooding the world with light.

When supper was over, Daphne bounded out into the moonlit garden, and began to play at battledore and shuttlecock. She was all life and fire and movement, and could not have sat still for the world.

'Come,' she cried to Martha; 'bring your battledore. A match for a franc's worth of nougat.'

Miss Dibb had settled herself to her everlasting crochet by the light of two tall candles. Miss Toby was reading a Tauchnitz novel.

'I'm tired to death,' grumbled Martha. 'I'm sure we must have walked miles upon miles. How can you be so restless?'

'How can you mope indoors on such an exquisite night?' exclaimed Daphne. 'I feel as if I could send my shuttlecock up to the moon. Come out and be beaten! No; you are too wise. You know that I should win to-night.'

The little toy of cork and feathers quivered high up in the bright air; the slender, swaying figure bent back like a reed as the girl looked upward; the fair golden head moved with every motion of the battledore as the player bent or rose to anticipate the flying cork.

She was glad to be out there alone. She was thinking of the unknown all the time. She could not get him out of her mind. She had a vague unreasonable idea that he must be near her; that he saw her as she played; that he was hiding somewhere in the shadow yonder, peeping over the wall; that he was in the moon—in the night—everywhere; that it was his breath which

fluttered those leaves trembling above the wall; that it was his footfall which she heard rustling among the shrubs—a stealthy, mysterious sound mingling with the plish-plash of the fountain in the next garden. She had talked lightly enough a little while ago of having seen the last of him: yet now, alone with her thoughts in the moonlit garden, it seemed as if this nameless stranger were interwoven with the fabric of her life, a part of her destiny for evermore.

CHAPTER III.

'AND VOLATILE, AS AY WAS HIS USAGE.'

ANOTHER brilliant summer day, a cloudless blue sky, a world steeped in sunshine. On the broad gravelled space in front of the palace-railings the heat and glare would have been too much for a salamander, and even Daphne, who belonged to the salamander species in so much as she had an infinite capacity for enjoying sunshine, blinked a little as she crossed the shelterless promenade, under her big tussore parasol, a delightfully cool-looking figure, in a plain white muslin gown, and a muslin shepherdess hat.

Poor Miss Toby's chronic headache had been a little worse this morning. Heroically had she striven to fulfil her duty, albeit to lift her leaden head from the pillow was absolute agony. She sat at the breakfast-table, white, ghastly, uncomplaining, pouring out coffee, at the very odour of which her bilious soul sickened. Vainly did Daphne entreat her to go back to bed, and to leave her charges to take care of themselves, as they had done yesterday.

'We won't go to the forest any more till you are able to go with us,' said Daphne, dimly conscious that her behaviour in that woodland region had been open to blame. 'We can just go quietly to the palace, and stroll through the rooms with the few tourists who are likely to be there to-day. The Fontainebleau season has hardly begun, don't you know, and we may have nobody but the guide, and of course he must be a respectable person.'

'My dear, I was sent here to take care of you both, and I must do my duty,' answered Miss Toby with a sickly smile. 'Yesterday my temples throbbed so that I could hardly move, but I am a little better to-day, and I shall put on my bonnet and come with you.'

She rose, staggered a few paces towards the adjacent chamber, and reeled like a landsman at sea. Then she sank into the nearest chair, and breathed a weary sigh.

'It's no use, Toby darling,' cried Daphne, bending over her with tenderest sympathy. To be tender, sweet, and sympathetic in little outward ways, tones of voice, smiles, and looks, was one of Daphne's dangerous gifts. 'My dearest Toby, why struggle against the inevitable?' she urged. 'It is simply one of your regular bilious attacks. All you have to do is to lie quietly in a dark room and sleep it off, just as you have so often done before. To-morrow you will be as well as I am.'

'Then why not wait till to-morrow for seeing the palace,' said Miss Toby faintly, 'and amuse yourselves at home, for once in a way? You really ought to study a little, Daphne. Madame will be horrified if she finds you have done no work all this time.'

'But I do work of an evening—sometimes, dearest,' expostulated Daphne; 'and I'm sure you would not like us to be half suffocated all day in this stifling little salon, poring over horrid books. We should be having the fever next, and then how would you account to Madame for your stewardship?'

'Don't be irreverent, Daphne,' said Miss Toby, who thought that any use of scriptural phrases out of church was a kind of blasphemy. 'I think you would really be better indoors upon such a day as this; but I feel too languid to argue the point. What would you like best, Martha?'

Miss Dibb, who employed every odd scrap of spare time in the development of her *magnum opus* in crochet-work, looked up with a glance of indifference, and was about to declare her willingness to stay indoors for ever, so that the crochet counterpane might flourish and wax wide, when a stealthy frown from Daphne checked her.

'Daphne would rather see the palace to-day, I know,' she replied meekly, 'and I think,' with a nervous glance at her schoolfellow, who was scowling savagely, 'I think I would rather go too.'

'Well,' sighed Miss Toby, 'I have made an effort, but I feel that I could not endure the glare out of doors. You must go alone. Be sure you are both very quiet, if there are tourists about. Don't giggle, or look round at people, or make fun of their gowns and bonnets, as you are too fond of doing. It is horribly unladylike. And if any stranger should try to get into conversation with you—of course only a low-bred person would do such a thing—pray remember that your own self-respect would counsel you to be dumb.'

'Can you suppose we would speak to anyone?' exclaimed Daphne, as she tripped away to her little bedroom, next door to Miss Toby's. It was the queerest little room, with a narrow, white-muslin-curtained bed in a recess, and a marvellous piece of furniture which was washstand, chest of drawers, and dress-

ing-table all in one. A fly-spotted glass, inclining from the wall above this *multum in parvo*, was Daphne's only mirror.

Here she put on her muslin hat, with a bouquet of blue corn-flowers perched coquettishly on the brim, making a patch of bright cool colour that refreshed the eye. Never had she looked prettier than this midsummer morning. Even the fly-spotted clouded old glass told her as much as that.

'If—if he were to be doing the *château* to-day,' she thought, tremulous with excitement, 'how strange it would be. But that's not likely. He is not of the common class of tourists, who all follow the same beaten track. I daresay he will idle away the afternoon in the woods, just as he did yesterday.'

'Martha, shall we go to the forest to-day, and leave the *château* to be done to-morrow with Toby?' Daphne asked, when she and her companion were crossing the wide parade-ground, where the soldiers trotted by with a great noise and clatter early in the morning, with a fanfare of trumpets and an occasional roll of a drum. 'It might seem kinder to poor dear Toby, don't you know.'

'I think it would be very wrong, Daphne,' answered the serious Martha. 'We told Miss Toby we were going to the palace, and we are bound to go straight there and nowhere else. Besides, I want to see the pictures and statues and things, and I am sick to death of that forest.'

'After one day! Oh, Martha, what an unromantic soul you must have. I could live and die there, if I had pleasant company. I have always envied Rosalind and Celia.'

'They must have been very glad when they got home,' said Martha.

Out of the blinding whiteness of the open street they went in at a gate to a gravelled quadrangle, where the sun seemed to burn with yet more fiery heat. Even Daphne felt breathless, but it was a pleasant feeling, the delight of absolute summer, which comes so seldom in the changeful year. Then they went under an archway, and into the inner quadrangle, with the white palace on all sides of them. It wanted some minutes of eleven, and they were shown into a cool official-looking room, where they were to wait till the striking of the hour. The room was panelled, painted white, a room of Louis the Fourteenth's time most likely; what little furniture there was being quaint and rococo, but not old. The blinds were down, the shutters half-closed, and the room was in deep shadow.

'How nice!' gasped Martha, who had been panting like a fish out of water all the way.

'It is like coming into a grotto,' said Daphne, sinking into a chair.

'It is not half so nice as the forest,' said a voice in the semi-darkness.

Daphne gave a visible start. She had mused upon the possibility of meeting her acquaintance of yesterday, and had decided that the thing was unlikely. Yet her spirits had been buoyed by a lurking idea that he might crop up somehow before the day was done. But to find him here at the very beginning of things was startling.

'Did you know that we were coming here to-day?' she faltered.

'Hadn't the slightest idea; but I wanted to see the place myself,' he answered coolly.

Daphne blushed rosy-red, deeply ashamed of her foolish, impulsive speech. The stranger had been sitting in that cool shade for the last ten minutes, and his eyes had grown accustomed to the obscurity. He saw the blush, he saw the bright expressive face under the muslin hat, the slim figure in the white frock, every line sharply accentuated against a gray background, the slender hand in a long Swedish glove. She looked more womanly in her white gown and hat—and yet more child-like—than she had looked yesterday in blue and scarlet.

They sat for about five minutes in profound silence. Daphne, usually loquacious, felt as if she could not have spoken for the world. Martha was by nature stolid and inclined to dumbness. The stranger was watching Daphne's face in a lazy reverie, thinking that his hurried sketch of yesterday was not half so lovely as the original, and yet it had seemed to him almost the prettiest head he had ever painted.

'The provoking minx has hardly one good feature,' he thought. 'It is an utterly unpaintable beauty—a beauty of colour, life, and movement. Photograph her asleep, and she would be as plain as a pike-staff. How different from——'

He gave a faint sigh, and was startled from his musing by the door opening with a bang and an official calling out, 'This way, ladies and gentlemen.'

They crossed the blazing courtyard in the wake of a brisk little gentleman in uniform, who led them up a flight of stone steps, and into a stony hall. Thence to the chapel, and then to an upper story, and over polished floors through long suites of rooms, everyone made more or less sacred by historical memories. Here was the table on which Napoleon the Great signed his abdication, while his Old Guard waited in the quadrangle below. Daphne looked first at the table and then out of the window, almost as if she expected to see that faithful soldiery drawn up in the stony courtyard—grim bearded men who had fought and conquered on so many a field, victors of Lodi and Arcola, Austerlitz and Jena, Friedland and Wagram, and who knew now that all was over and their leader's star had gone down.

Then to rooms hallowed by noble Marie Antoinette, lovely alike in felicity and in ruin. Smaller, prettier, more home-like

rooms came next, where the Citizen King and his gentle wife tasted the sweetness of calm domestic joys; a tranquil gracious family circle; to be transferred, with but a brief interval of stormy weather, to the quiet reaches of the Thames, in Horace Walpole's beloved 'County of Twits.' Then back to the age of tournaments and tented fields; and, lo! they were in the rooms which courtly Francis built and adorned, and glorified by his august presence. Here, amidst glitter of gold and glow of colour, the great King—Charles the Fifth's rival and victor—lived and loved, and shed sunshine upon an adoring court. Here from many a canvas, fresh as if painted yesterday, looked the faces of the past. Names fraught with romantic memories sanctify every nook and corner of the palace. Everywhere appears the cypher of Diana of Poitiers linked with that of her royal lover, Henry the Second. Catherine de Médicis must have looked upon those interlaced initials many a time in the period of her probation, looked, and held her peace, and schooled herself to patience, waiting till Fortune's wheel should turn and bring her day of power. Here in this long, lofty chamber, sunlit, beautiful, the fated Monaldeschi's life-blood stained the polished floor.

'To say the least of it, the act was an impertinence on Queen Christina's part, seeing that she was only a visitor at Fontainebleau,' said the stranger languidly. 'Don't you think so, Poppæa?'

Daphne required to have the whole story told her; that particular event not having impressed itself on her mind.

'I have read all through Bonnechose's history of France, and half way from the beginning again,' she explained. 'But when one sits droning history in a row of droning girls, even a murder doesn't make much impression upon one. It's all put in the same dull, dry way. This year there was a great scarcity of corn. The poor in the provinces suffered extreme privations. Queen Christina, of Sweden, while on a visit at Fontainebleau, ordered the execution of her counsellor Monaldeschi. There was also a plague at Marseilles. The Dauphin died suddenly in the fifteenth year of his age. The king held a Bed of Justice for the first time since he ascended the throne. That is the kind of thing, you know.'

'I can conceive that so bald a calendar would scarcely take a firm grip upon one's memory,' assented the stranger. 'Details are apt to impress the mind more than events.'

After this came the rooms which the Pope occupied during his captivity—rooms that had double and treble memories; here a nuptial-chamber, there a room all a-glitter with gilding—a room that had sheltered Charles the Fifth, and afterwards fair, and not altogether fortunate, Anne of Austria. Daphne felt as if her brain would hardly hold so much history. She felt a

kind of relief when they came to a theatre, where plays had been acted before Napoleon the Third and his lovely empress in days that seemed to belong to her own life.

'I think I was born then,' she said naïvely.

There had been no other visitors—no tourists of high or low degree. The two girls and the unknown had had the palace to themselves, and the guide, mollified by a five-franc piece slipped into his hand by the gentleman, had allowed them to make their circuit at a somewhat more leisurely pace than that brisk trot on which he usually insisted.

Yet for all this it was still early when they came down the double flight of steps and found themselves once again in the quadrangle, the Court of Farewells, so called from the day when the great emperor bade adieu to pomp and power, and passed like a splendid apparition from the scene he had glorified. The sun had lost none of his fervour—nay, had ascended to his topmost heaven, and was pouring down his rays upon the baking earth.

'Let us go to the gardens and feed the carp,' said Nero, and it was an infinite relief, were it only for the refreshment of the eye, to find themselves under green leaves and by the margin of a lovely lake, statues of white marble gleaming yonder at the end of verdant arcades, fountains plashing. Here under the trees a delicious coolness and stillness contrasted with the glare of light on the open space yonder, where an old woman sat at a stall, set out with cakes and sweetmeats, ready to supply food for the carp-feeders.

'Yes: let us feed the carp,' cried Daphne, running out into this sunlit space, her white gown looking like some saintly raiment in the supernatural light of a transfiguration. 'That will be lovely! I have heard of them. They are intensely old, are they not—older than the palace itself?'

'They are said to have been here when Henry and Diana walked in yonder alleys,' replied Nero. 'I believe they were here when the Roman legions conquered Gaul. One thing seems as likely as the other, doesn't it, Poppæa?'

'I don't know about that: but I like to think they are intensely old,' answered Daphne, leaning on the iron railing, and looking down at the fish, which were already competing for her favours, feeling assured she meant to feed them.

The old woman got up from her stool, and came over to ask if the young lady would like some bread for the carp.

'Yes, please—a lot,' cried Daphne, and she began to fumble in her pocket for the little purse with its three or four francs and half-francs.

The stranger tossed a franc to the woman before Daphne's hand could get to the bottom of her pocket, and the bread was forthcoming—a large hunch off a long loaf. Daphne began

eagerly to feed the fish. They were capital fun, disputing vehemently for her bounty, huge gray creatures which looked centuries old—savage, artful, vicious exceedingly. She gave them each a name. One she called Francis, another Henry, another Diana, another Catherine. She was as pleased and amused as a child, now throwing her bit of bread as far as her arm could fling it, and laughing merrily at the eager rush of competitors, now luring them close to the rails, and smiling down at the gray snouts yawning for their prey.

'Do you think they would eat me if I were to tumble in among them?' asked Daphne. 'Greedy creatures! They seem ravenous enough for anything. There! they have devoured all my bread.'

'Shall I buy you some more?'

'Please, no. This kind of thing might go on for ever. They are insatiable. You would be ruined.'

'Shall we go under the trees?'

'If you like. But don't you think this sunshine delicious? It is so nice to bask. I think I am rather like a cat in my enjoyment of the sun.'

'Your friend seems to have had enough of it,' said Nero, glancing towards a sheltered bench to which Miss Dibb had discreetly withdrawn herself.

'Martha! I had almost forgotten her existence. The carp are so absorbing.'

'Let us stay in the sunshine. We can rejoin your friend presently. She has taken out her needlework, and seems to be enjoying herself.'

'Another strip of her everlasting counterpane,' said Daphne. 'That girl's persevering industry is maddening. It makes one feel so abominably idle. Would you be very shocked to know that I detest needlework?'

'I should as soon expect a butterfly to be fond of needlework as you,' answered Nero. 'Let me see your hand.'

She had taken off her glove to feed the carp, and her hand lay upon the iron rail, dazzlingly white in the sunshine; Nero took it up in his, so gently, so reverently, that she could not resent the action. He took it as a priest or physician might have taken it: altogether with a professional or scientific air.

'Do you know that I am a student of chiromancy?' he asked.

'How should I, when I don't know anything about you? And I don't even know what chiromancy is.'

'The science of reading fate and character from the configuration of the hand.'

'Why, that is what gipsies pretend to do,' cried Daphne. 'You surely cannot believe in such nonsense.'

'I don't know that my belief goes very far; but I have

found the study full of interest, and more than once I have stumbled upon curious truths.'

'So do the most ignorant gipsy fortune-tellers,' retorted Daphne. 'People who are always guessing must sometimes guess right. But you may tell my fortune all the same, please; it will be more amusing than the carp.'

'If you approach the subject in such an irreverent spirit, I don't think I will have anything to say to you. Remember, I have gone into this question thoroughly, from a scientific point of view.'

'I am sure you are wonderfully clever,' said Daphne; and then, in a coaxing voice, with a lovely look from the sparkling gray eyes, she pleaded: 'Pray tell my fortune. I shall be wretched if you refuse.'

'And I should be wretched if I were to disoblige you. Your left hand, please, and be serious, for it is a very solemn ordeal.'

She gave him her left hand. He turned the soft rosy childish palm to the sunlight, and pored over it as intently as if it had been some manuscript treatise of Albertus Magnus, written in cypher, to be understood only by the hierophant in science.

'You are of a fitful temper,' he said, 'and do not make many friends. Yet you are capable of loving intensely—one or two persons perhaps, not more; indeed, I think only one at a time, for your nature is concentrative rather than diffuse.'

He spoke slowly and deliberately—coldly indifferent as an antique oracle—with his eyes upon her hand all the time. He took no note of the changes in her expressive face, which would have told him that he had hit the truth.

'You are apt to be dissatisfied with life.'

'Oh, indeed I am,' she cried, with a weary sigh; 'there are times when I do so hate my life and all things belonging to me—except just one person—that I would change places with any peasant-girl trudging home from market.'

'You are romantic, variable. You do not care for beaten paths, and have a hankering for the wild and strange. You love the sea better than the land, the night better than the day.'

'You are a wizard,' cried Daphne, remembering her wild delight in the dancing waves as she stood on the deck of the Channel steamer, her intense love of the winding river at home—the deep, rapid stream—and of fresh salt breezes, and a free ocean life; remembering, too, how her soul had thrilled with rapture in the shadowy courtyard last night, when her shuttlecock flew up towards the moon. 'You have a wonderful knack of finding out things,' she said. 'Go on, please.'

He had dropped her hand suddenly, and was looking up at her with intense earnestness.

'Please go on,' she repeated impatiently.

'I have done. There is no more to be told.'

'Nonsense. I know you are keeping back something; I can see it in your face. There is something unpleasant—or something strange—I could see it in the way you looked at me just now. I insist upon knowing everything.'

'Insist! I am only a fortune-teller so far as it pleases me. Do you think if a man's hand told me that he was destined to be hanged, I should make him uneasy by saying so?'

'But my case is not so bad as that?'

'No; not quite so bad as that,' he answered lightly, trying to smile.

The whole thing seemed more or less a joke; but there are some natures so sensitive that they tremble at the lightest touch; and Daphne felt uncomfortable.

'Do tell me what it was,' she urged earnestly.

'My dear child, I have no more to tell you. The hand shows character rather than fate. Your character is as yet but half developed. If you want a warning, I would say to you: Beware of the strength of your own nature. In that lies your greatest danger. Life is easiest to those who can take it lightly—who can bend their backs to any burden, and be grateful for every ray of sunshine.'

'Yes,' she answered contemptuously; 'for the drudges. But please tell me the rest. I know you read something in these queer little lines and wrinkles,' scrutinising her pink palm as she spoke, 'something strange and startling—for you were startled. You can't deny that.'

'I am not going to admit or deny anything,' said Nero, with a quiet firmness that conquered her, resolute as she was when her own pleasure or inclination was in question. 'The oracle has spoken. Make the most you can of his wisdom.'

'You have told me nothing,' she said, pouting, but submissive.

'And now let us go out of this bakery, under the trees yonder, where your friend looks so happy with her crochet-work.'

'I think we ought to go home,' hesitated Daphne, not in the least as if she meant it.

'Home! nonsense. It isn't one o'clock yet; and you don't dine at one, do you?'

'We dine at six,' replied Daphne with dignity, 'but we sometimes lunch at half-past one.'

'Your luncheon isn't a very formidable affair, is it—hardly worth going home for?'

'It will keep,' said Daphne. 'If there is anything more to be seen, Martha and I may as well stop and see it.'

'There are the gardens, beyond measure lovely on such a day as this; and there is the famous vinery; and, I think, if

we could find a very retired spot out of the ken of yonder beardless patrol, I might smuggle in the materials for another picnic.'

'That would be too delightful,' cried Daphne, clapping her hands in childish glee, forgetful of fate and clairvoyance.

They strolled slowly through the blinding heat towards that cool grove where patient Martha sat weaving her web, as inflexible in her stolid industry as if she had been one of the fatal sisters.

'What have you been doing all this time, Daphne?' she asked, lifting up her eyes as they approached.

'Feeding the carp. You have no idea what fun they are.'

'I wonder you are not afraid of a sunstroke.'

'I am never afraid of anything, and I love the sun. Come, Martha, roll up that everlasting crochet, and come for a ramble. We are going to explore the gardens, and by-and-by Mr. Nero is going to get us some lunch.'

Martha looked at the unknown doubtfully, yet not without favour. She was a good, conscientious girl: but she was fond of her meals, and a luncheon in the cool shade of these lovely groves would be very agreeable. She fancied, too, that the stranger would be a good caterer. He was much more carefully dressed to-day, in a gray travelling suit. Everything about him looked fresh and bright, and suggestive of easy circumstances. She began to think that Daphne was right, and that he was no Bohemian artist, living from hand to mouth, but a gentleman of position, and that it would not be so very awkward to meet him in Regent-street, when she should be shopping with mamma and Jane.

They strolled along the leafy aisle on the margin of the blue bright lake, faintly stirred by lightest zephyrs. They admired the marble figures of nymph and dryad, which Martha thought would have looked better if they had been more elaborately clad. They wasted half an hour in happy idleness, enjoying the air, the cool umbrage of lime and chestnut, the glory of the distant light yonder on green sward or blue placid lake, enjoying Nature as she should be enjoyed, in perfect carelessness of mind and heart—as Horace enjoyed his Sabine wood, singing his idle praise of Lalage as he wandered, empty of care.

They found at last an utterly secluded spot, where no eye of military or civil authority could reach them.

'Now, if you two young ladies will only be patient, and amuse yourselves here for a quarter of an hour or so, I will see what can be done in the smuggling line,' said the unknown.

'I could stay here for a week,' said Daphne, establishing herself comfortably on the velvet turf, while Martha pulled out her work-bag and resumed her crochet-hook. 'Take your time, Mr. Nero. I am going to sleep.'

She threw off her muslin hat, and laid her cheek upon the soft mossy bank, letting her pale golden hair fall like a veil over her neck and shoulders. They were in the heart of a green *bosquet*, far from the palace, far from the beaten track of tourists. Nero stopped at a curve in the path to look back at the recumbent figure, the sunny falling hair, the exquisite tint of cheek and chin and lips, just touched by the sun-ray glinting through a break in the foliage. He stood for a few moments admiring this living picture, and then walked slowly down the avenue.

'A curious idle way of wasting a day,' he mused; 'but when a man has nothing particular to do with his days he may as well waste them one way as another. How lovely the child is in her imperfection! a faulty beauty—a faulty nature—but full of fascination. I must write a description of her in my next letter to my dear one. How interested she would feel in this childish, undisciplined character.'

But somehow when his next letter to the lady of his love came to be written he was in a lazy mood, and did not mention Daphne. The subject, to be interesting, required to be treated in detail, and he did not feel himself equal to the task.

'Isn't he nice?' asked Daphne, when the unknown had departed.

'He is very gentlemanlike,' assented Martha, 'but still I feel we are doing wrong in encouraging him.'

'Encouraging him!' echoed her schoolfellow. 'You talk as if he were a stray cur that had followed us.'

'You perfectly well know what I mean, Daphne. It cannot be right to get acquainted with a strange gentleman as we have done. I wouldn't have mamma or Jane know of it for the world.'

'Then don't tell them,' said Daphne, yawning listlessly, and opening her rosy palm for a nondescript green insect to crawl over it.

'But it seems such a want of candour,' objected Martha.

'Then tell them, and defy them. But whatever you do, don't be fussy, you dear good-natured old Martha; for of all things fussiness is the most detestable in hot weather. As for Mr. Nero, he will be off and away across the Jura before to-morrow night, I daresay, and he will forget us, and we shall forget him, and the thing will be all over and done with. I wish he would bring us our luncheon. I'm hungry.'

'I feel rather faint,' admitted Martha, who thought it ungenteel to confess absolute hunger. 'That bread we get for breakfast is all sponginess. Shall you tell your sister about Mr Nero?'

'That depends. I may, perhaps, if I should be hard up for something to say to her.'

'Don't you think she would be angry?'

'She never is angry. She is all sweetness and goodness, and belief in other people. I have spent very little of my life with her, or I should be ever so much better than I am. I should have grown up like her perhaps—or just a little like her, for I'm afraid the clay is different—if my father would have let me be brought up at home.'

'And he wouldn't?' asked Martha.

She had heard her friend's history very often, or as much of it as Daphne cared to tell, but she was always interested in the subject, and encouraged her schoolfellow's egotism. Daphne's people belonged to a world which Miss Dibb could never hope to enter; though perhaps Daphne's father, Sir Vernon Lawford, had no larger income than Mr. Dibb, whose furniture and general surroundings were the best and most gorgeous that money could buy.

'No. When I was a little thing I was sent to a lady at Brighton, who kept a select school for little things; because my father could not bear a small child about the house. When I grew too tall for my frocks, and was all stocking and long hair, I was transferred to a very superior establishment at Cheltenham, because my father could not be worried by the spectacle of an awkward growing girl. When I grew still taller, and was almost a young woman, I was packed off to Madame Tolmache to be finished; and I am to be finished early next year, I believe, and then I am to go home, and my father will have to endure me.'

'How nice for you to go home for good! And your home is very beautiful, is it not?' asked Martha, who had heard it described a hundred times.

'It is a lovely house in Warwickshire, all amongst meadows and winding streams—a long, low, white house, don't you know, with no end of verandahs and balconies. I have been there very little, as you may imagine, but I love the dear old place all the same.'

'I don't think I should like to live so far in the country,' said Martha: 'Clapham is so much nicer.'

'*Connais pas*,' said Daphne indifferently.

The unknown came sauntering back along the leafy arcade, but not alone; an individual quite as fashionably clad, and of appearance as gentlemanlike, walked a pace or two behind him.

'Well, young ladies, I have succeeded splendidly as a smuggler; but I thought two could bring more than one, so I engaged an ally. Now, Dickson, produce the Cliquot.'

The individual addressed as Dickson took a gold-topped pint bottle out of each side-pocket. He then, from some crafty lurking-place, drew forth a crockery encased pie, some knives and forks, and a couple of napkins, while Nero emptied his own

pockets, and spread their contents on the turf. He had brought some wonderful cherries—riper and sweeter-looking than French fruit usually is—several small white paper packages which suggested confectionery, a tumbler, and half-a-dozen rolls, which he had artfully disposed in his various pockets.

'We must have looked rather bulky,' he said; 'but I suppose the custodians of the place were too sleepy to take any notice of us. The nippers, Dickson? Yes! Thoughtful man! You can come back in an hour for the bottles and the pie-dish.'

Dickson bowed respectfully and retired.

'Is that your valet?' asked Daphne.

'He has the misfortune to fill that thankless office.'

Daphne burst out laughing.

'And you travel with your own servant?' she exclaimed. 'It is too absurd! Do you know that yesterday I took you for a poor strolling artist, and I felt that it would be an act of charity to give you half-a-guinea for that sketch?'

'You would not have obtained it from me for a thousand half-guineas. No; I do not belong to the hard-up section of humanity. Perhaps many a penniless scamp is a better and happier man than I; but, although poverty is the school for heroes, I have never regretted that it was not my lot to be a pupil in that particular academy. And now, young ladies, fall to, if you please. Here is a Perigord pie, which I am assured is the best that Strasbourg can produce, and here are a few pretty tiny kickshaws in the way of pastry; and here, to wash these trifles down, is a bottle of the Widow Cliquot's champagne.'

'I don't know that I ever tasted champagne in my life.'

'How odd!' cried Martha. 'What, not at juvenile parties?'

'I have never been at any juvenile parties.'

'We have it often at home,' said Martha, with a swelling consciousness of belonging to wealthy people. 'At picnics, and whenever there is company to luncheon. The grown-ups have it every evening at dinner, if they like. Papa takes a particular pride in his champagne.'

They grouped themselves upon the grass, hidden from all the outside world by rich summer foliage, much more alone than they had been yesterday in the heart of the forest. Honest Martha Dibb, who had been sorely affronted at the free-and-easiness of yesterday's simple meal, offered no objection to the luxurious feast of to-day. A man who travelled with his valet could not be altogether an objectionable person. The whole thing was unconventional—slightly incorrect, even—but there was no longer any fear that they were making friends with a vagabond, who might turn up in after life and ask for small loans.

'He is evidently a gentleman,' thought Martha, quite overcome by the gentility of the valet. 'I daresay papa and mamma would be glad to know him.'

Her spirits enlivened by the champagne, Miss Dibb became talkative.

'Do you know Clapham Common?' she asked the stranger.

'I have heard of such a place. I believe I have driven past it occasionally on my way to Epsom,' he answered listlessly, with his eyes on Daphne, who was seated in a lazy attitude, her back supported by the trunk of a lime-tree, her head resting against the brown bark, which made a sombre background for her yellow hair, her arms hanging loose at her sides in perfect restfulness, her face and attitude alike expressing a dreamy softness, as of one for whom the present hour is enough, and all time and life beyond it no more than a vague dream. She had just touched the brim of the champagne glass with her lips and that was all. She had pronounced the Perigord pie the nastiest thing that she had ever tasted; and she had lunched luxuriously upon pastry and cherries.

'I live on Clapham Common, when I am at home,' said Martha. 'Papa has bought a large house, with a Corinthian portico, and we have ever so many hot-houses. Papa takes particular pride in his grapes and pines. Are you fond of pines?'

'Not particularly,' answered Nero, stifling a yawn. 'And where do you live when you are at home, my pretty Poppæa?' he asked, smiling at Daphne, who had lifted one languid arm to convey a ripe red cherry to lips that were as fresh and rosy as the fruit.

'In Oxford Street,' answered Daphne coolly.

Miss Dibb's eyebrows went up in horrified wonder; she gave a little gasp, as who should say, 'This is too much!' but did not venture a contradiction.

'In Oxford Street? Why, that is quite a business thoroughfare. Is your father in trade?'

'Yes. He keeps an Italian warehouse.'

Martha became red as a turkey-cock. This was a liberty which she felt she ought to resent at once; but, sooth to say, the matter-of-fact Martha had a wholesome awe of her friend. Daphne was very sweet; Daphne and she were sworn allies; but Daphne had a sharp tongue, and could let fly little shafts of speech, half playful, half satiric, that pierced her friend to the quick.

'I hope there is nothing that I need be ashamed of in my father's trade,' she said gravely.

'Of course not,' faltered the stranger. 'Trade is a most honourable employment of capital and intelligence. I have the greatest respect for the trading classes—but——'

'But you seemed surprised when I told you my father's position.'

'Yes; I confess that I was surprised. You don't look like a tradesman's daughter, somehow. If you had told me that your

father was a painter, or a poet, or an actor even, I should have thought it the most natural thing in the world. You look as if you were allied to the arts.'

'Is that a polite way of saying that I don't look quite respectable?'

'I am not going to tell you what I mean. You would say I was paying you compliments, and I believe you have tabooed all compliments. I may be ruder than Petruchio—didn't you tell me so in the forest yesterday?—but any attempt at playing Sir Charles Grandison will be resented.'

'I certainly like you best when you are rude,' answered Daphne.

She was not as animated as she had been yesterday during their homeward walk. The heat and the supreme stillness of the spot invited silence and repose. She was, perhaps, a little tired by the exploration of the *château*. She sat under the drooping branches of the lime, whose blossoms sweetened all the air, half in light, half in shadow: while Martha, who had eaten a hearty luncheon, and consumed nearly a pint of Cliquot, plodded on with her crochet-work, and tried to keep the unknown in conversation.

She asked him if he had seen this, and that, and the other —operas, theatres, horticultural fêtes—labouring hard to make him understand that her people were in the very best society—as if opera-boxes and horticultural fêtes meant society! and succeeded only in boring him outrageously.

He would have been content to sit in dreamy silence watching Daphne eat her cherries. Such an occupation seemed best suited to the sultry summer silence, the perfumed atmosphere.

But Martha thought silence must mean dulness.

'We are dreadfully quiet to-d y,' she said. 'We must do something to get the steam up. Shall we have some riddles? I know lots of good ones that I didn't ask you yesterday.'

'Please don't,' cried Nero; 'I am not equal to it. I think a single conundrum would crush me. Let us sit and dream.

> "How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
> With half-shut eyes ever to seem
> Falling asleep in a half-dream!
> To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
> Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height."'

Martha looked round inquiringly. She did not see either myrrh-bush or height in the landscape. They were in a level bit of the park, shut in by trees.

'Is that poetry?' she asked.

'Well, it's the nearest approach to it that the last half-century has produced,' replied the unknown, and then he went on quoting:

> "'But propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
> How sweet (while warm airs lull us blowing lowly),
> With half-dropt eyelids still,
> Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
> To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
> His waters from the purple hill."

Poppæa, I wish you and I were queen and king of a Lotos Island, and could idle away our lives in perpetual summer.'

'We should soon grow tired of it,' answered Daphne. 'I am like the little boy in the French story-book. I delight in all the seasons. And I daresay you skate, hunt, and do all manner of things that couldn't be done in summer.'

'True, my astute empress. But when one is setting under lime-boughs on such a day as this, eternal summer seems your only idea of happiness.'

He gave himself up to idle musing. Yes; he was surprised, disappointed even, at the notion of this bright-haired nymph's parentage. There was no discredit in being a tradesman's daughter. He was very far from feeling a contempt for commerce. There were reasons in his own history why he should have considerable respect for successful trade. But for this girl he had imagined a different pedigree. She had a high-bred air—even in her reckless unconventionality—which accorded ill with his idea of a prosperous tradesman's daughter. There was a poetry in her every look and movement, a wild untutored grace, which was the strangest of all flowers to have blossomed in a parlour behind a London shop. Reared in the smoke and grime of Oxford Street! Brought up amidst ever present considerations of pounds, shillings, and pence! The girl and her surroundings were so incongruous that the mere idea of them worried him.

'And by-and-by she will marry some bloated butcher or pompous coach-builder, and spend all her days among the newly rich,' he thought. 'She will grow into the fat wife of a fat alderman, and overdress and overeat herself, and live a life of prosperous vulgarity.'

The notion was painful to him, and he was obliged to remind himself that there was very little likelihood of his ever seeing this girl again, so that the natural commonplaceness of her fate could make very little difference to him.

'Better to be vulgarly prosperous and live to be a great-grandmother than to fulfil the prophecy written on her hand,' he said to himself. 'What does it matter? Let us enjoy to-day, and let the long line of to-morrows rest in the shadow that wraps the unknown future. To-morrow I shall be on my way to Geneva, panting and stifling in a padded railway-carriage, with oily Frenchmen, who will insist upon having the windows up through the heat and dust of the long summer

day, and I shall look back with envy to this delicious afternoon.'

They sat under the limes for a couple of hours, talking a little now and then in a desultory way; Martha trying her hardest to impress the unknown with the grandeurs and splendours of Lebanon Lodge, Clapham Common; Daphne saying very little, content to sit in the shade and dream. Then having taken their fill of rest and shadow, they ventured out into the sun, and went to see the famous grapery, and then Martha looked at her watch and protested that they must go home to tea. Miss Toby would be expecting them.

Nero went with them to the gates of the palace, and would fain have gone further, but Daphne begged him to leave them there.

'You would only frighten our poor governess,' she said. 'She would think it quite a terrible thing for us to have made your acquaintance. Please go back to your hotel at once.'

'If you command me to do so, I must obey,' said Nero politely.

He shook hands with them for the first time, gravely lifted his hat, and walked across to his hotel. It was on the opposite side of the way, a big white house, with a garden in front of it, and a fountain playing. The two girls stood in the shadow watching him.

'He is really very nice,' said Martha. 'I think mamma would like to have him at one of her dinner-parties. But he did not tell us anything about himself, did he?'

Daphne did not hear her. There was hardly room in that girlish brain for all the thoughts that were crowding into it.

CHAPTER IV.

'CURTEIS SHE WAS, DISCRETE, AND DEBONAIRE.'

THE world was nine months older since Daphne picnicked in the park at Fontainebleau, and the scenery of her life was changed to a fair English landscape in one of the fairest of English shires. Here, in fertile Warwickshire, within three miles of Shakespeare's birthplace, within a drive of Warwick and Leamington, and Kenilworth, and Stoneleigh Park, to say nothing of ribbon-weaving, watch-making Coventry, Daphne wandered in happy idleness through the low-lying water meadows, which bounded the sloping lawns and shady gardens of South Hill.

South Hill was a gentle elevation in the midst of a pastoral valley. A long, low, white house, which had been added to

from time to time, crowned the grassy slope, and from its balconied windows commanded one of the prettiest views in England—a landscape purely pastoral and rustic; low meadows through which the Avon wound his silvery way between sedgy banks, with here a willowy islet, and there a flowery creek. On one side the distant roofs and gables and tall spire of Stratford, seen above intervening wood and water; on the other a gentle undulating landscape, bounded by a range of hills purple with distance.

It was not an old house. There was nothing historical about it; though South Hill, with between three and four hundred acres, had belonged to Sir Vernon Lawford's family since the reign of Elizabeth. There had been an ancient mansion; but the ancient mansion, being an unhealthy barrack of small low rooms, and requiring the expenditure of five thousand pounds to make it healthy and habitable, Sir Vernon's father had conceived the idea that he could make a better use of his money if he pulled down the old house and built himself a new one: whereupon the venerable pile was demolished, much to the disgust of archæologists, and an Italian villa rose from its ashes: a house with wide French windows opening into broad verandahs, delicious places in which to waste a summer morning, or the idle after-dinner hour watching the sunset. All the best rooms at South Hill faced the south-west, and the sunsets there seemed to Madoline Lawford more beautiful than anywhere else in the world. It was a house of the simplest form, built for ease and comfort rather than for architectural display. There were long cool corridors, lofty rooms below and above stairs, a roomy hall, a broad shallow staircase, and at one end of the house a spacious conservatory which had been added by Sir Vernon soon after his marriage. This conservatory was the great feature of South Hill. It was a lofty stone building, with a double flight of marble steps descending from the drawing-room to the billiard-room below. Thus drawing-room and billiard-room both commanded a full view of the conservatory through wide glass doors.

There were melancholy associations for Sir Vernon Lawford in this wing which he had added to South Hill. He had built it to give pleasure to his first wife, an heiress, and the most amiable of women: but before the building was finished the first Lady Lawford was in her grave, leaving a baby girl of two months old behind her. The widower grieved intensely; but he proved no exception to the general rule that the more intense the sorrow of the bereaved the more speedily does he or she seek consolation in new ties. Sir Vernon married again within two years of his wife's death; and, this time, instead of giving satisfaction to the county by choosing one of the best born and wealthiest ladies within its length and breadth, he

picked up his wife somewhere on the Continent—a fact which in the opinion of the county was much in her disfavour—and when he brought her home and introduced her to his friends, he was singularly reticent as to her previous history.

The county people shrugged their shoulders, and doubted if this marriage would end well. They had some years later the morbid satisfaction of being able to say that they had prophesied aright. The second Lady Lawford bore her husband two children, a boy and a girl, and within a year of her daughter's birth mysteriously disappeared. She went to the South of France, it was said, for her lungs; though everybody's latest recollection of her was of a young woman in the heyday of health, strength, and beauty: somewhat self-willed, very extravagant, inordinately fond of pleasure, and governing her husband with the insolence of conscious beauty.

From that southern journey she never came back. Nobody ever heard any explicit account of her death; yet after two or three years it became an accepted fact that she was dead. Sir Vernon travelled a good deal, while his maiden sister kept house for him at South Hill, and superintended the rearing of his children. Madoline, daughter and heiress of the first Lady Lawford, was brought up and educated at home. Loftus, the boy, went to a private tutor at Stratford, and thence to Rugby, where he fell ill and died. Daphne's childhood and early girlhood were spent almost entirely at school. Only a week ago she was still at Asnières, grinding away at the everlasting prosy old books, reciting Lafontaine's fables, droning out long singsong speeches from Athalie or Iphigénie, teasing poor patient Miss Toby, domineering over Martha Dibb. And now her education was supposed to be finished, and she was free—free to roam like a wild thing about the lovely grounds at South Hill, in the water-meadows where the daffodils grew in such rank luxuriance: and where, years ago, when she was a little child, and had crowned herself with a chaplet of those yellow flowers, scarcely brighter than her hair, a painter-friend of her father's had called her Asphodel.

How well she remembered that sunny morning in early April—ages ago! Childhood seems so far off at seventeen. How distinctly she remembered the artist whose refined and gentle manners had won her childish heart! She had been so little praised at South Hill that her pulses thrilled with pleasure when her father's friend smiled at her flower-crowned head and cried: 'What a lovely picture! Look, Lawford, would not you like me to paint her just as she is at this moment, with her hair flying in the wind, and that background of rushes and blue water? But Sir Vernon turned on his heel with a curt half-muttered answer, and the two men walked on and left her, smoking their cigarettes as they went. She remembered

how, in a blind childish fury, scarce knowing why she was angry, she tore the daffodil crown from her hair and trampled it under foot.

To the end of his visit the painter called her Asphodel, and one morning finding her alone in the garden, he carried her off to the billiard-room and made a sketch of her head with its loose tangled hair: a head which appeared next year on the line at the Royal Academy and was raved about by all artistic London.

And now it was early April again, and she was a girl in the fair dawn of womanhood, free to do what she liked with her life, and there were many things that she was beginning to understand, things not altogether pleasant to her womanly pride. She was beginning to perceive very clearly that her father did not love her, and was never likely to love her, that her presence in his home gave him no pleasure, that he simply endured her as part of the burden of life, while to her sister he gave love without stint or measure. True that he was by nature and habit selfish and self-indulgent, and that the love of such a man is at best hardly worth having. But Daphne would have been glad of her father's love, were the affection of ever so poor a quality. His indifference chilled her soul. She had been accustomed to command affection; to be petted and praised and bowed down to for her pretty looks and pretty ways; to take a leading position with her schoolfellows, partly because she was Sir Vernon Lawford's daughter, and partly for those subtle charms and graces which made her superior to the rank and file of school-girls.

Yet, though Sir Vernon was wanting in affection for his younger daughter, Daphne was not unloved at South Hill. Her sister Madoline loved her dearly, had so loved her ever since those unforgotten summer days when the grave girl of nine and the toddling two-year-old baby wandered hand-in-hand in shrubberies and gardens, and seemed to have the whole domain of South Hill to themselves, Sir Vernon and Lady Lawford being somewhere on the Continent, and the maiden aunt being a lady very much in request in the best society in the neighbourhood, and very willing to take the utmost enjoyment out of life, and to delegate her duties to nurses and maids. The love that had grown up in those days between the sisters had been in no wise lessened by severance. They were as devoted to each other now as they had been in the dawn of life: Madoline loving Daphne with a proud protecting love; Daphne looking up to Madoline with intense respect, and believing in her as the most perfect of women.

'I'm afraid I shall never be able to leave off talking,' said Daphne upon this particular April morning, when she had come in from a long ramble by the Avon, with her apron full

of daffodils; 'I seem to have such a world of things to tell you.'

'Don't put any check upon your eloquence, darling. You won't tire me,' said Madoline in her low gentle voice.

She had a very soft voice, and a slow calm way of speaking, which seemed to most people to be the true patrician tone. She spoke like a person who had never been in a hurry, and had never been in a passion.

The sisters were in Madoline's morning-room, sometimes called the old drawing-room, as it had been the chief reception-room at South Hill before Sir Vernon built the west wing. It was a large airy room, painted white, with chintz draperies of the lightest and most delicate tints—apple-blossoms on a creamy ground; the furniture all of light woods; the china celadon or turquoise; but the chief beauty of the room, its hot-house flowers—tulips, gardenias, arums, hyacinths, pansies, grouped with exquisite taste on tables and in jardinières, on brackets and mantelpiece. The love of flowers was almost a passion with Madoline Lawford, and she was rich enough to indulge this inclination to her heart's content. She had built a long line of hot-houses in one of the lower gardens, and kept a small regiment of gardeners and boys. She could afford to do this, and yet to be Lady Bountiful in all the district round about South Hill; so nobody ventured to blame her for the money she spent upon horticulture.

She was a very handsome woman—handsome in that perfectly regular style about which there can be no difference of opinion. Some might call her beauty cold, but all must own she was beautiful. Her profile was strongly marked, the forehead high and broad, the nose somewhat aquiline; the mouth proud, calm, resolute, yet infinitely sweet when she smiled; the eyes almost black, with long dark lashes, sculptured eyelids, and delicately-pencilled brows. She wore her hair as she might have worn it had she lived in the days of Pericles and Aspasia—simply drawn back from her forehead, and twisted in a heavy Greek knot at the back of her head; no fringed locks or fluffiness gave their factitious charm to her face. Her beauty was of that calm statuesque type which has nothing to do with chic, piquancy, dash, audacity, or any of those qualities which go such a long way in the composition of modern loveliness.

All her tastes were artistic; but her love of art showed itself rather in the details of daily life than in any actual achievement with brush or pencil. She worked exquisitely in crewels and silks, drew her own designs from natural flowers, and produced embroideries on linen or satin which were worthy to be hung in a picture-gallery. She had a truly feminine love of needlework, and was never idle—in this the very reverse of Daphne, who

loved to loll at ease, looking lazily at the sky or the landscape, and making up her mind to be tremendously busy by-and-by. Daphne was always beginning work, and never finishing anything; while every task undertaken by Madoline was carried on to completion. The very essence of her own character was completeness—fulfilling every duty to the uttermost, satisfying in fullest measure every demand which home or society could make upon her.

'I'm sure you'll be tired of me, Lina,' protested Daphne, kneeling on the fender-stool, while Madoline sat at work in her accustomed place, with a Japanese bamboo table at her side for the accommodation of her crewels. 'You can't imagine what a capacity I have for talking.'

'Then I must be very dull,' murmured Madoline, smiling at her. 'You have been home a week.'

'Well, certainly, you have had some experience of me; but you might think my loquacity a temporary affliction, and that when I had said my say after nearly two years of separation—oh, Lina, how horrid it was spending all my holidays at Asnières!—I should subside into comparative silence. But I shall always have worlds to tell you. It is my nature to say everything that comes into my mind. That's why I got on so well with Dibb.'

'Was Dibb a dog, dear?'

'A dog!' cried Daphne, with a sparkling smile. 'No, Dibb was my schoolfellow—a dear good thing—stupid, clumsy, innately vulgar, but devoted to me. "A poor thing, but mine own," as Touchstone says. We were tremendous chums.'

'I am sorry you should make a friend of any innately vulgar girl, Daphne dear,' said Madoline gravely; 'and don't you think it rather vulgar to talk of your friend as Dibb?'

'We all did it,' answered Daphne with a shrug; 'I was always called Lawford. It saves trouble, and sounds friendly. You talk about Disraeli and Gladstone; why not Dibb and Lawford?'

'I think there's a difference, Daphne. If you were very friendly with this Miss Dibb, why not speak of her by her christian name?'

'So be it, my dearest. In future she shall be Martha, to please you. She really is a good inoffensive soul. Her father keeps a big shop in Oxford Street; but the family live in a palace on Clapham Common, with gardens, and vineries, and pineries, and goodness knows what. When I call her vulgar it is because she and all her people are so proud of their money, and measure everything by the standard of money. Martha was very inquisitive about my means. She wanted to know whether I was rich or poor, and I really couldn't inform her. Which am I, Lina?'

Daphne looked up at her sister as if it were a question about

which she was slightly curious, but not a matter of supreme moment. A faint flush mounted to Madoline's calm brow. The soft dark eyes looked tenderly at Daphne's eager face.

'Dearest, why trouble yourself about the money question? Have you ever felt the inconvenience of poverty?'

'Never. You sent me everything I could possibly wish for; and I always had more pocket-money than any girl in the school, not excepting Martha; though she took care to inform me that her father could have allowed her ten times as much if he had chosen. No, dear: I don't know what poverty means; but I should like to understand my own position very precisely, now that I am a woman, don't you know? I am quite aware that you are an heiress: everybody at South Hill has taken pains to impress that fact upon my mind. Please, dear, what am I?'

'Darling, papa is not a rich man, but he——' Madoline paled a little as she spoke, knowing that South Hill had been settled on her mother, and her mother's children after her, and that, in all probability, Sir Vernon had hardly any other property in the world. 'He will provide for you, no doubt. And if he were unable to leave you much by-and-by, I have plenty for both.'

'I understand,' said Daphne, growing pale in her turn; 'I am a pauper.'

'Daphne!'

'My mother had not a sixpence, I suppose: and that is why nobody ever speaks of her; and that is why there is not a portrait of her in this house, where she lived, and was admired, and loved. I was wrong to call Dibb vulgar for measuring all things by a money standard. It is other people's measure, as well as hers.'

'Daphne, how can you say such things?'

'Didn't I tell you that I say everything that comes into my head? Oh, Madoline, don't for pity's sake think that I envy you your wealth—you who have been so good to me, you who are all I have to love in this world! It is not the money I care for. I think I would just as soon be poor as rich, if I could be free to roam the world, like a man. But to live in a great house, waited on by an army of servants, and to know that I am nobody, of no account, a mere waif, the penniless daughter of a penniless mother—that wounds me to the quick.'

'My dearest, my pet, what a false, foolish notion! Do you think anybody in this house values you less because I have a fortune tied to me by all manner of parchment deeds, and you have no particular settlement, and have only expectations from a not over-rich father? Do you think you are not admired for your grace and pretty looks, and that by-and-by there will not come the best substitute which modern life can give for the prince of our dear old fairy tales—a good husband, who will

be wealthy enough to give my darling all she can desire in this world?'

'I'm sure I shall hate him, whoever he may be,' said Daphne, with a short, impatient sigh.

Madoline looked at her earnestly, with the tender motherly look which came naturally to the beautiful face when the elder sister looked at the younger. She had put aside her crewel-work at the beginning of this conversation, and had given all her attention to Daphne.

'Why do you say that, dearest?' she asked gravely.

'Oh, I don't know, really. But I'm sure I shall never marry.'

'Isn't it rather early to make up your mind on that point?'

'Why should it be? Hasn't one a mind and a heart at seventeen as well as at seven-and-twenty? I should like well enough to have a very rich husband by-and-by, so that, instead of being Daphne, the pauper, I might be Mrs. Somebody, with ever so much a year settled upon me for ever and ever. But I don't believe I shall ever see anybody I shall be able to care for.'

'I hope, darling, you haven't taken it into your foolish head that you care for some one already. School-girls are so silly.'

'And generally fall in love with the dancing-master,' said Daphne, with a laugh. 'I think I tried rather hard to do that, but I couldn't succeed. The poor man wore a wig; a dreadfully natural, dreadfully curly wig; like the pictures of Lord Byron. No, Lina; I pledge you my word that no dancing-master's image occupies my breast.'

'I am glad to hear it,' answered Madoline. 'I hope there is no one else.'

Daphne blushed rosy red. She took a gardenia from the low glass vase on her sister's work-table, where the white waxen flowers were clustered in the centre of a circle of purple pansies, and began to pick the petals off slowly, one by one.

'He loves me—loves me not,' she whispered softly, smiling all the while at her own foolishness, till the smile faded slowly at sight of the barren stem.

'Loves me not,' she sighed. 'You see, Fate is against me, Lina. I am doomed to die unmarried.'

'Daphne, do you mean that there is someone?' faltered Madoline, more in earnest than it might seem needful to be with a creature so utterly childlike.

'There was a man once in a wood,' said Daphne, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyelids, yet with an arch smile curling her lips all the while. 'There was a man whom Dibb—I beg your pardon, Martha—and I once met in a wood in our holidays—papa would have me spend my holidays at school, you see—and I have thought since, sometimes—mere idle fancy, no doubt—that he is the only man I should ever care to marry; and that

is impossible, for he is engaged to someone else. So you see I am fated to die a spinster.'

'Daphne, what do you mean? A man whom you met in a wood, and he was engaged—and——! You don't mean that you and your friend Miss Dibb made the acquaintance of a strange man whom you met when you were out walking,' exclaimed Madoline, aghast at the idea. 'Surely you were too well looked after for that! You never went out walking alone, did you? I thought Frenchwomen were so extremely particular.'

'Of course they are,' replied Daphne, laughing. 'I was only drawing on my imagination, dearest, just to see that solemn face of yours. It was worth the trouble. No, Lina dear, there is no one. My heart is as free as my shuttlecock, when I send it flying over the roof scaring the swallows. And now, let us talk about your dear self. I want you to tell me all about Mr. Goring; about Gerald. I suppose I may call him by his christian name, as he is to be my brother-in-law by-and-by.'

'Your brother, dear.'

'Thank you, Lina. That sounds ever so much nicer. I am so short of relations. Then I shall always call him Gerald. What a pretty name!'

'He was called after his mother, Lady Geraldine.'

'I see. She represented the patrician half of his family, and his father the plebeian half, I believe? The father was a Dibb, was he not—a money-grubber?'

'His father was a very worthy man, who rose from the ranks, and made his fortune as a contractor.'

'And Lady Geraldine married him for the sake of his worthiness; and you and Gerald are going to spend his money.'

'Mr. Goring and his wife were a very united couple, I believe, Daphne. There is no reason why you should laugh at them.'

'Except my natural malice, which makes me inclined to ridicule good people. You should have said that, Madoline; for you look as if you meant it. Was the contractor's name always Goring?'

'No; he was originally a Mr. Giles, but he changed his name soon after his marriage, and took the name of his wife's maternal grandfather, a Warwickshire squire.'

'What a clever way of hooking himself on to the landed gentry!' said Daphne. 'And now, please tell me all about Gerald. Is he very nice?'

'You may suppose that I think him so,' answered Madoline, going on with the fashioning of a water-lily on a ground of soft gray cloth. 'I can hardly trust myself to praise him, for fear I should say too much.'

'How is it that I have seen no photograph of him? I expected to see ha lfa dozen portraits of him in this room alone;

but I suppose you have an album crammed with his photos somewhere under lock and key.'

'He has not been photographed since he was a school-boy. He detests photography; and though he has often promised me that he would sacrifice his own feelings so far as to be photographed, he has never kept his word.'

'That is very bad of him,' said Daphne. 'I am bursting with curiosity about his looks. But—perhaps,' she faltered, with a deprecating air, 'the poor thing is rather plain, and that is why he does not care to be photographed.'

'No,' replied Madoline, with her gentle smile; 'I do not think his worst enemy could call him plain—not that I should love him less if he were the plainest of mankind.'

'Yes, you would,' exclaimed Daphne, with conviction. 'It is all very well to talk about loving a man for his mind, or his heart, and all that kind of thing. You wouldn't love a man with a potato-nose or a pimply complexion, if he were morally the most perfect creature in the universe. I am very glad my future brother is handsome.'

'That is a matter of opinion—I don't know your idea of a handsome man.'

'Let me see,' said Daphne, clasping her hands above her head, in a charmingly listless attitude, and giving herself up to thought. 'My idea of good looks in a man? The subject requires deliberation. What do you say to a pale complexion, inclining to sallowness; dreamy eyes, under dark straight brows; forehead low, yet broad enough to give room for plenty of brains; mouth grave, and even mournful in expression, except when he smiles—the whole face must light up like a god's when he smiles; hair darkest brown, short, straight, silky?'

'One would think you had seen Mr. Goring, and were describing him,' said Madoline.

'What, Lina, is he like that?'

'It is so difficult to realise a description, but really yours might do for Gerald. Yet, I daresay, the image in your mind is totally different from that in mine.'

'No doubt,' answered Daphne, and then, with a half-breathed sigh, she quoted her favourite Tennyson. 'No two dreams are alike.'

'You will be able to judge for yourself before long,' said Madoline; 'Gerald is coming home in the autumn.'

'The autumn!' cried Daphne. 'That is an age to wait. And then, I suppose, you are to be married immediately?'

'Not till next spring. That is my father's wish. You see, I don't come of age till I'm twenty five, and there are settlements and technical difficulties. Papa thought it best for us to wait, and I did not wish to oppose him.'

'I believe it is all my father's selfishness. He can't bear to lose you.'

'Can I be angry with him for that?' asked Madoline, smiling tenderly at the thought of her father's love. 'I am proud to think that I am necessary to his happiness.'

'But there is your happiness—and Mr. Goring's—to be considered. It has been such a long engagement, and you have been kept so much apart. It must have been a dreary time for you. If ever I am engaged I hope my young man will always be dancing attendance upon me.'

'My father thought it best that we should not be too much together, for fear we should get tired of each other,' said Madoline, with an incredulous smile; 'and as Gerald is very fond of travelling, and wanted change after the shock of his mother's death, papa proposed that he should spend the greater part of his life abroad until my twenty-fifth birthday. The separation would be a test for us both, my father thought.'

'A most cruel, unjustifiable test,' cried Daphne indignantly. 'Your twenty-fifth birthday, forsooth! Why, you will be an old woman before you are married. In all the novels I ever read, the heroine married before she was twenty, and even then she seemed sometimes quite an old thing. Eighteen is the proper age for orange-blossoms and a Brussels veil.'

'That is all a matter of opinion, pet. I don't think young lady novelists of seventeen and eighteen have always the wisest views of life. You must not say a word against your father, Daphne. He always acts for the best.'

'I never heard of a domestic tyrant yet of whom that could not be said,' retorted Daphne. 'However, darling, if you are satisfied, I am content; and I shall look forward impatiently to the autumn, and to the pleasure of making my new brother's acquaintance. I hope he will like me.'

'No fear of that, Daphne.'

'I am not at all sure of winning his regard. Look at my father! I would give a great deal to be loved by him, yet he detests me.'

'Daphne! How can you say such a thing?'

'It is the truth. Why should I not say it? Do you suppose I don't know the signs of aversion as well as the signs of love? I know that you love me. You have no need to tell me so. I do not even want the evidence of your kind acts. I am assured of your love. I can see it in your face; I can hear it in every tone of your voice. And I know just as well that my father dislikes me. He kept me at a distance as long as ever he could, and now that duty—or his regard for other people's opinion—obliges him to have me at home, he avoids me as if I were a roaring lion, or something equally unpleasant.'

'Only be patient, dear. You will win his heart in time,' said

Madoline soothingly. She had put aside the water-lily, and had drawn her sister's fair head upon her shoulder with caressing fondness. 'He cannot fail to love my sweet Daphne when he knows her better,' she said.

'I don't know that. I fancy he was prejudiced against me when I was a little thing and could scarcely have offended him; unless it were by cutting my teeth disgustingly, or having nettle-rash, or something of that kind. Lina, do you think he hated my mother?'

Madoline started, and flushed crimson.

'Daphne! what a question! Why, my father's second marriage was a love-match, like his first.'

'Yes, I suppose he was in love with her, or he would hardly have married a nobody,' said Daphne, in a musing tone; 'but he might have got to hate her afterwards.'

At this moment the door was opened, and a voice, full, round, manly in tone, said: 'Madoline, I want you.'

Lina rose hastily, letting her work fall out of her lap, kissed Daphne, and hurried from the room at her father's summons.

CHAPTER V.

'THOU LOVEST ME, THAT WOT I WEL CERTAIN.'

MANY a time since her home-coming had Daphne been on the point of telling her sister all about that more or less anonymous traveller, whom she called the man in the wood; but her picnicking adventures, looked at retrospectively from the strictly-correct atmosphere of home, seemed much more terrible than they had appeared to her at Asnières; where a vague hankering after forbidden pleasures was an element in the girlish mind, and where there was a current idea that the most appalling impropriety was allowable, provided the whole business were meant as a joke. But Daphne, seated at Madoline's feet, began to feel doubtful if there were any excuse for such joking; and, after that one skirmishing approach to the subject, she said no more about the gentleman who had called himself Nero. It was hateful to her to have a secret, were it the veriest trifle, from her sister; but the idea of Madoline's disapproval was still more repugnant to her; and she was very certain that Madoline would disapprove of the whole transaction in which Mr. Nero had been concerned.

'I could never tell her how thoroughly at home I felt with him,' mused Daphne; 'how easy and natural our acquaintance seemed—just as if we had been destined from the very beginning of time to meet at that hour and at that spot. And to

part so soon!' added Daphne with a sigh. 'It seemed hardly worth while to meet.'

Yes; it was a mystery upon which Daphne brooded very often in the fair spring weather, as she wandered by her beloved river. Strange that two lives should meet and touch for a moment, like circles on yonder placid water—meet, and touch, and part, and never meet again!

'The rings on the river break when they touch,' thought Daphne. 'They are fatal to each other. Our meeting had no significance: two summer days and it was all over and ended. I wonder whether Nero ever thought of Poppæa after he left Fontainebleau? Poppæa! What a silly name; and what a simpleton he must have thought me for assuming it.'

Of all things at South Hill, where there was so much that was beautiful, Daphne loved the river. It had been her delight when she was a tiny child, hardly able to syllable the words that were meant to express admiration. She had wanted to walk into the water—had struggled in her nurse's arms to get at it, and make herself a part of the thing that seemed so beautiful. Then when she was just a little older and a little wiser, it had been her delight to sit on the very edge of the stream, to sit hidden in the rushes, spelling out a fairy tale. In those early days she would have been happy if the world had begun and ended in those low-lying meadows where daffodils, and orchises, and bluebells grew in such rich abundance that she could gather and waste them all day long, yet make no perceptible difference in their number; where the lazy cattle stood half the day breast-high in the weedy water, dreaming with wide-open eyes; where the shadow of a bird flitting across the stream was the only thing that gave token of life's restlessness. Later there came a happy midsummer holiday when her father was away at Ems, nursing his last fancied disorder, and she and Madoline were alone together at South Hill under the protection of the maiden aunt, who never interfered with anybody's pleasure so long as she could enjoy her own way of life; and in a willow-shaded creek Daphne found a disused forgotten punt which had lain stagnant in the mud for the last seven years, and with the aid of a youth who worked in the gardens she had so patched and caulked and painted this derelict as to make it tolerably water-tight, and in this frail and clumsy craft she had punted herself up and down a shallow tributary of the deep swift Avon, as far afield as she could go without making Madoline absolutely miserable.

And now being 'finished,' and a young woman, Daphne asked herself where she was to get a boat. She had plenty of pocket-money. There was an old boat-house under one of the willows where she could keep her skiff. She had learnt to swim at Asnières, so there could be no danger. So she took counsel

with the garden youth, who had grown into a man by this time, and asked him whether he could buy her a boat, and where.

'That's accordin' to the kind o' boat as you might fancy, miss,' answered her friend. 'There's a many kind o' boats, you see.'

'Oh, I hardly know; but I should like something light and pretty, a long, narrow boat, don't you know?' and Daphne went on to describe an outrigger.

'Lord, miss, it would be fearful dangerous. You'd be getting he among the weeds, and upsettin' un. You'd better have a dingey. That's safe and comfortable like.'

'A dingey's a thing like a washing-tub, isn't it?'

'Rayther that shape, miss.'

'I wouldn't sit in such a thing for the world. No, Bink, if I can't have a long, narrow boat with a sharp nose, I'll have a punt. I think I should really like a punt. I was so fond of that one. I feel quite sorry that the rats ate it. Yes; you must buy me a punt. There'll be plenty of room in it for my drawing-board, and my books, and my crewel-work; for I mean to live on the river when the summer comes. How soon can you buy me my punt?'

'I think as how you'd better have a dingey, miss,' said Bink. 'It was all very well pushing about a punt in the creeks when you was a child, but a punt don't do in deep water. You can have a nice-shaped dingey, not too much of a tub, you know, and a pair o' sculls, and I'll teach you to row. I can order it any arternoon that I can get an 'oliday, miss. There's a good boat-builder at Stratford. I'll order he to build it.'

'How lovely,' cried Daphne, clapping her hands. 'A boat built on purpose for me! It must have no end of cushions, for my sister will come with me very often, of course. And it must be painted in the early English style. I'll have a dark red dado.'

'A what, miss?'

'A dado, Bink. The lower half of the inside must be painted dark red, and the upper half a lovely cream colour; and the outside must be a dark greenish-brown. You understand, don't you?'

'Not over well, miss. You'd better write it down for the boat-builder.'

'I'll do better than that, Bink—I'll make a sketch of the boat, and paint it the colours I want. And it—she—must have a name, I suppose.'

'Boats has names mostly, miss.'

'My boat shall not be nameless. I'll call her——' A pause, then a sudden dimpling smile and a bright blush, loveliness thrown away on Bink, who stood at ease leaning on his hoe and staring at the river. 'I'll call her—Nero.'

'An 'ero, miss. What 'ero? The old Dook o' Wellington?

He were an 'ero, warn't he? Or Nelson? That's more of a name for a boat.'

'Nero, Bink. Nero. I'll write it down for the boat-builder.'

'You'd better, please, miss. I never was good at remembering names.'

When Daphne had given Bink the sketch, with full authority to commission her boat, she had an after-thought about her father. The boat-house was his property; even the river in some measure belonged to him: he had at least riparian rights. So after dinner that evening, when Madoline and she were sitting opposite each other in silence at the pretty table, bright with velvety gloxinias and maidenhair ferns, while Sir Vernon leant back in his chair, sipping his claret, and grumbling vaguely about things in general, the indolence of his servants, the unfitness of his horses, the impending ruin of the land in which he lived, and the crass ignorance of the pig-headed body of men who were pretending to govern it, Daphne, in a pause of the paternal monologue, lifted up her voice.

'Papa, may I have a dingey, please? I can buy it with my own money.'

'A dingey!' exclaimed Sir Vernon. 'What in Heaven's name is a dingey?'

He had an idea that it must be some article of female attire or of fancy-work, since his frivolous young daughter desired to possess it.

'A dingey—is—a kind of boat, papa.'

'Oh, a dingey!' exclaimed Sir Vernon, as if she had said something else in the first instance. 'What can you want with a dingey?'

'I am so dearly fond of the river, papa; and a dingey is such a safe boat, Bink says.'

'Who is Bink?'

'One of the under gardeners.'

'A curious authority to quote. So you want a dingey, and to row yourself about the river like a boy.'

'There is no one to notice me, papa.'

'The place is secluded enough, so long as you don't go beyond our own meadows. I desired Madame Tolmache to have you taught swimming. Can you swim?'

'Yes, papa. I believe I am a rather good swimmer.'

'Well, you can have your boat—it is a horribly masculine taste—always provided you do not go beyond our own fields. I cannot have you boating over half the county.'

'I shall be quite happy to keep to our own fields, papa,' Daphne answered meekly.

She enlisted the devoted Bink in her service next morning; he patched up the old boat-house, and whitewashed the inside walls; much to the displeasure of Mr. MacCloskie, the head gar-

dener, a gentleman in broadcloth and a top hat, who seemed to do little more than walk about the grounds, smoke his pipe in the hot-houses, plan expensive improvements, and order costly novelties from the most famous nurseries at home and abroad. Bink ought to have been wheeling manure from the stable during that very afternoon which he had devoted to the repair of the boat-house ; and Mr. MacCloskie declared that the future well-being of his melon-bed was imperilled by the young man's misconduct.

'I shall complain to Sir Vernon,' said MacCloskie.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. MacCloskie, but Miss Daphne told me to do it.'

'Miss Daphne, indeed ! I can't have my gardeners interfered with by Miss Daphne,' exclaimed MacCloskie ; as much as to say that his master's second daughter was a person of very small account.

He gave Daphne a lecture that evening, in very broad Scotch, when he met her in the rose-garden.

'You'll be meddling with my roses next, miss, I suppose,' he said severely. 'You young ladies from boarding-school have no respect for anything.'

'Your roses !' cried Daphne, with a contemptuous glance at the closely-pruned twigs of the standards, which at this early period looked as if they would never flower again. 'When I see any I shall know how to appreciate them. Roses, indeed ! I wonder you like to mention them. Everything flowers a month earlier in France than you can make it do here. I had a finer Gloire de Dijon nodding in at my window at Asnières this time last year than you ever saw in your life' ; and she marched off, leaving MacCloskie with a dim idea that in any skirmish with this young lady he was likely to be worsted.

How ardently she had longed for home a few weeks ago, when she was counting the days that must pass before the appointed date of her return, under the wing of Madame Tolmache, who crossed the Channel reluctantly once or twice a year to escort pupils, and was prostrate in the cabin throughout the brief sea-passage, leaving the pupils to take care of themselves, and so horribly ill on landing that the pupils had to take care of her. So long as South Hill was in the future Daphne had believed that perfect happiness awaited her there—gladness without a flaw—but now that she was at home, established, a recognised member of the family for all her life to come, she began to discover that even at South Hill life was not perfect happiness. She was devotedly fond of Madoline, and Madoline was full of affection—careful, anxious, almost maternal love—for her. There was no flaw in her gladness here. But every hour she spent in her father's company made her more certain of the one painful fact that he did not care for her. There was

even in her mind the terrible suspicion that he actually disliked her; that he would have been glad to have her out of his way—married, dead and buried—anything so that she might be removed from his path.

She was very young, and her spirits had all the buoyancy of youth that has never been acquainted with sordid cares. So there was plenty of gladness in her life. It was only now and then that the thought of her father's indifference, or possible dislike, drifted like a passing cloud across her mind, and took the charm out of everything.

'What a lovely place it is!' she said to Madoline, one evening after dinner, when they were strolling about the lawn, where three of the finest deodaras in the county rose like green towers against the warm western sky: 'I am fonder of it every day, yet I can't help feeling that I'm an interloper.'

'Daphne! You—the daughter of the house!'

'A daughter: not the daughter,' answered Daphne. 'Sometimes I fancy that I am a daughter too many. You should have heard how MacCloskie talked to me yesterday because I had taken Bink from his work for an hour or two. If I had been a poor little underpaid nursery governess he couldn't have scolded me more severely. And I think servants have a knack of finding out their master's feelings. If I had been a favourite with my father, MacCloskie would never have talked like that. A favourite! What nonsense! It is so obvious that I bore him awfully.'

'Daphne, if you are going to nurse this kind of fancy you will never be happy,' Madoline said earnestly, winding her arm round her sister, as they sauntered slowly down the sloping lawn, side by side. 'You must make every allowance for papa; he is not a demonstrative man. His manner may seem cold, perhaps—'

'Cold!' cried Daphne: 'it is ice. I feel I have entered the frigid zone directly I go into his presence. But he is not cold to you; he has love enough, and to spare, for you.'

'We have been so much together. I have learned to be useful to him.'

'Yes; you have spent your life with him, while I have been an outcast and an alien.'

'Daphne, you have no right to speak like that. My father is a man of peculiar temper. It pleased him to have only one daughter at home till both were grown up. You were more lively than I—younger by seven years—and he fancied you would be noisy. He is a nervous man, wanting an atmosphere of complete repose. And now you are grown up, and have come home for good; and I really cannot see any reason why you should complain.'

'No; there is nothing to complain about,' cried Daphne

bitterly, 'only that I have been cheated out of a father's love. Not by you, Lina dearest; no, not by you,' she exclaimed, when her sister would have spoken. 'I am not base enough to be jealous of you; you who have been my good angel always. No, dear; but he has cheated me. My father has cheated me in not giving me a chance of getting at his heart when I was a child. What is the good of my trying now? I come home to him as a stranger. How can he be expected to care for me?'

'If he does not love you now, my pet—and mind, I don't admit that it is so—he will soon learn to be fond of you. He can't help admiring my sweet young sister,' said Madoline, with tearful eyes.

'I will never plague you about him any more, dear,' protested Daphne, with a penitent air. 'I will try to be satisfied with your affection. You do love me, don't you?'

'With all my strength.'

'And to do my duty in that state of life, etc., etc., etc.'

'Talking of duty, Daphne, I have been wanting to make a suggestion for the last week or two,' said Madoline gently. 'Don't you think it would be better for you if you were to employ yourself a little more?'

'Employ myself!' cried Daphne. 'Why, I have been tremendously busy for the last three days—about the dingey.'

'Dearest, you are laughing at me. I mean that at seventeen—'

'And a half,' interjected Daphne, with dignity.

'At seventeen your education can hardly be completed.'

'I know ridiculously little, though I have been outrageously crammed. I'm afraid all the sciences and languages and literature have got mixed up in my brain, somehow,' said Daphne; 'but I am awfully fond of poetry. I know a good deal of Tennyson by heart. I could repeat every line of "The Lotos Eaters," if you asked me,' said Daphne, blushing unaccountably.

'I think you ought to read, dear,' pursued Madoline gravely.

'Why, so I do. Didn't I read three volumes of "Sair for Somebody," in a single day, in order that the book might go back to Mudie's?'

'That rubbishing story! Daphne dear, you know I am talking of serious reading.'

'Then you had better find somebody else to talk to,' said Daphne. 'I never could pin my mind to a dull book; my thoughts go dancing off like butterflies, skimming away like swallows. I could no more plod through a history, or a volume of "Voyages in Timbuctoo," or "Sir Somebody's Memoirs at the Court of Queen Joan of Naples," or "A Waiting-woman's Recollections of Peter the Great," than I could fly. There are a few characters in history I like to read about—in short instalments. Napoleon the Great, for instance. There is a hero

for you—bloodthirsty, but nice. Mary Stuart, Julius Cæsar, Sir Walter Raleigh, Columbus, Shakespeare. These shine out like stars. But the dull dead level of history—the going out of the Whigs and the coming in of the Tories, the everlasting battles in the Netherlands or the Punjaub! I envy you your faculty of taking interest in such dry-as-dust stuff, but I cannot imitate you.'

'I like to be able to talk to papa—and to Gerald, by-and-by,' said Madoline shyly.

'Does papa talk of the Punjaub?'

'Not often, dear: but in order to understand the events of one's own day, it is necessary to know the history of the past. Papa likes to discuss public affairs, and I generally read the *Times* to him every morning, as you know.'

'Yes,' answered Daphne; 'I know you are his slave.'

'Daphne, it is my delight to be useful to him.'

'Yes: that is the sort of woman you are, always sacrificing your own happiness for other people. But I love you for it, dearest,' exclaimed Daphne, with one of her sudden gushes of affection. 'Only don't ask me to improve myself, darling, now that I am tasting perfect liberty for the first time in my life. Think how I have been ground and polished and governessed and preached at, and back-boarded,' drawing up her slim figure straight as an arrow, 'and dumb-belled, and fifth-positioned, for so many weary years of my life, and let me have my fling of idleness at home. I began to wonder if I really had a home, my father kept me away from it so long. Let me be idle and happy, Lina, for a little while; I shall mend by-and-by.'

'My pet, do you suppose I don't wish you to be happy? But I don't want your education to come to a full stop, because you have left school.'

'Let me learn to be like you, if I can. There could be no higher education than that.'

'Flatterer!'

'No, Lina, no one can flatter perfection.'

Madoline stopped her with a kiss, blushing at her praise. And then they turned and walked slowly back to the house, across the dewy lawn, where the shadows of the deodaras had deepened and lengthened with the rising of the moon. Daphne paused on the terrace to look back at the low-lying river gleaming between its willowy banks—so beautiful and ghostly a thing in the moonlight that it almost seemed as if it belonged to another world.

'How lovely it is out of doors!' sighed Daphne. 'Doesn't it seem foolishness to shut oneself up in a house? Stay a little longer, Lina.'

'Papa would not like to be deserted, dear. And Aunt Rhoda talked about coming in this evening.'

'Then I am in for a lecture,' said Daphne. 'Aunt Rhoda told me to go and see her, and I haven't been.'

There was a brilliant light in the billiard-room, and the two girls went in through the conservatory and down the marble steps to the room where they were most likely to find their father at this time of the evening. Sir Vernon Lawford was not an enthusiastic billiard-player; indeed, he was not enthusiastic about anything, except his own merits, of which he had a very exalted opinion. He played a game of billiards every evening, because it kept him awake and kept him in gentle movement, which state of being he considered good for his health. He played gravely, as if he were doing his duty to society, and played well; and though he liked to have his elder daughter in the room while he played, and could bring himself to tolerate the presence of other people, he resented anything distracting in the way of conversation.

Seen in the bright white light of the carcel lamps, Sir Vernon Lawford, at fifty-three years of age, was still a handsome man—a tall, well set-up man, with a hard, clearly chiselled face, eyes of lightish gray, cold and severe in expression, gray hair and whiskers, hands of feminine delicacy in shape and colour, and something rigid and soldierlike in his bearing, as of a man who had been severely drilled himself, and would be a martinet in his rule over others.

He was bending over the table with frowning brow, meditating a difficult stroke, as the two girls came softly in through the wide doorway—two tall slim figures in white gowns, with a background of flowers and palms showing dimly behind them, and beyond the foliage and flowers, the glimmer of a marble balustrade.

A fashionably-dressed lady of uncertain age, the solitary spectator of the game, sat fanning herself in silence by the wide marble fire-place.

Sir Vernon's antagonist came quietly forward to greet Madoline and her sister.

'I am so glad you have come in,' he said confidentially. 'I am getting ignominiously licked. I had a good mind to throw up the sponge and bolt out into the garden after you just now; only I thought if I didn't take my licking decently, Sir Vernon would never play with me again. Isn't it too delicious out there among the deodaras?'

'Heavenly,' exclaimed Daphne; 'and the river looks like the *chemin du Paradis*. I wonder you can stay in this glaring room.'

Sir Vernon had made up his mind by this time, and with a slow and gentle stroke, made a cannon and sent his adversary's ball into a pocket.

'Just like my luck,' said the adversary, while Sir Vernon again deliberated.

He was a man of about seven-and-twenty, tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking, with something of a gladiatorial air in his billiard-room undress. He was fair, with a healthy Saxon colour, and Saxon blue eyes; features not chiselled, but somewhat heavily moulded, yet straight and regular withal; hair, a lightish brown, cropped closely to a well-shaped head: forehead, fairly furnished with intellectual organs, but not the brow of poet or philosopher, wit or savant: a good average English forehead, a good average English face, beaming with good-nature, as he stands by Madoline's side, chalking his cue as industriously as if chalk could win the game.

This was Edgar Turchill, of Hawksyard Grange, Sir Vernon Lawford's most influential and pleasantest neighbour, a country squire of old family and fair fortune, owner of one of the most interesting places in the county, a real Warwickshire manor-house, and the only son of his widowed mother.

The lady by the fire-place now began to think she had been neglected long enough, and beckoned Daphne with her fan. She beckoned the girl with an authoritative air which distinctly indicated relationship.

'Come here and sit by me, child,' she whispered, tapping the fender-stool with the point of her embroidered shoe, whereupon Daphne meekly crouched at the lady's feet, prepared for the worst. 'Why have you never been to the Rectory?'

Daphne twisted her fingers in and out of her slender watch-chain with an embarrassed air.

'Indeed, I hardly know why, Aunt Rhoda,' she faltered; 'perhaps it was because I was enjoying myself so much. Everything at home was so new to me, you see—the gardens, the river, the meadows.'

'You were enjoying yourself so much that you had no inclination to see your aunt and uncle?'

'Uncle?' echoed Daphne. 'Oh, you mean the Rector?'

'Of course. Is he not your uncle?'

'Is he, aunt? I know he's your husband; but as you only married him a year ago, and he hadn't begun to be my uncle when I was last at home, it never occurred to me ——'

'That by my marriage with him he had become your uncle. That looks like ignorance, Daphne, or want of proper feeling,' said the Rector's wife with an offended air.

'It was ignorance, Aunt Rhoda. At Madame Tolmache's they taught us so much geography and geology and astronomy, don't you know, that they were obliged to keep us in the dark about uncles and aunts. And am I really to call the Rector, uncle? It seems quite awful.'

'Why awful?'

'Because I have looked up to him all my life as a being in a black silk gown who preached long sermons and would do some-

thing awful to me if I laughed in church. I looked upon him as the very embodiment of the Church, don't you know, and should hardly have believed that he wanted breakfast and dinner, and wore out his clothes and boots like other men. When he came to call I used to run away and hide myself. I had an idea that he would scold me if I came in his way—take me to task for not being a christian, or ask me to repeat last Sunday's Gospel. And to think that he should be my uncle. How curiously things come round in this life!'

'I hope you will not cease to respect him, and that you will learn to love him,' said Aunt Rhoda severely.

'Learn to love him! Do you think he would like it?' asked Daphne doubtfully.

'He would like you to behave to him as a niece ought, Daphne. Marmaduke considers my relations his own.'

'I'm sure it is very good of him,' said Daphne, 'but I should think it must come a little difficult after having known us so long in quite another capacity.'

The Rector's wife gave her niece a look of half interrogation, half disapproval. She did not know how much malice might lurk under the girl's seeming innocence. She and Daphne had never got on very well together in the old days, when Miss Lawford was the mistress of South Hill, and the arbiter of her nieces' lives.

A year ago, and Rhoda Lawford, at three-and-forty, was still Rhoda Lawford; and any idea of matrimonial promotion which she had once cherished might fairly be supposed to have expired in the cold shade of a neighbourhood where there were very few marriageable men. But Rhoda had begun life as a girl with considerable pretensions. She had never asserted herself or been put forward by her friends as a beauty. The material for that kind of reputation was wanting. But she had been admired and praised for her style, her manner, her complexion, her hair, her hands, her feet, her waist, her shoulders. She was a young lady with good points, and had been admired for her points. People had talked of her as the elegant Miss Lawford: and as, happily, elegance is a quality which time need not impair, Rhoda had gone on being elegant for five-and-twenty years. The waist and shoulders, the hands and feet, had never been out of training for a quarter of a century. More ephemeral charms had bloomed and faded; and many a fair friend of Rhoda's who had triumphed in the insolence of conscious beauty was now a *passée* matron, of whom her acquaintance said pityingly, 'You have no idea how pretty that woman was fifteen years ago;' but the elegant Miss Lawford's attractions were unimpaired, and the elegant Miss Lawford had not yet surrendered the hope of winning a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

The living of Baddesley-with-Arden was one of those fat

sinecures which are usually given to men of good family and considerable private means. The Reverend Marmaduke Ferrers was the descendant of a race well rooted in the soil, and had, by the demise of two bachelor uncles and three maiden aunts, accumulated to himself a handsome property, in land, and houses, and the safer kind of public securities. These legacies had fallen in at lengthy intervals, some of the aunts being slow in relaxing their grip upon this world's gear; but had all the wealth of a Westminster or a Rothschild been poured into the Reverend Marmaduke's lap, he would not have renounced the great tithes of Baddesley-with-Arden, or the important, and, in a manner, judicial and dictatorial position which he held as Rector of those two small parishes. Mr. Ferrers loved the exercise of authority on a small scale. He had an autocratic mind, but it was a very small mind, and it suited him to be the autocrat of two insignificant pastoral villages, rather than to measure his power against the men of cities. To hector Giles for getting drunk on a Saturday night, to lecture Joan for her absence from church on Sunday, afforded the Rector as much delight as a bigger man might have felt in towering over the riot of a Republican chamber or proroguing a Rump parliament. Mr. Ferrers had been Rector of Baddesley thirty years, and in all that time he had never once thought of taking to himself a wife. He had a lovely old Rectory and a lovelier garden; he had the best servants in the neighbourhood—partly because he was a most exacting master, and partly because he paid his housekeeper largely, and made her responsible for everybody else. The whole machinery of his life worked with a delightful smoothness. He had nothing to gain from matrimony in the way of domestic comfort; and there is always the possibility of loss. Thus it happened that although he had gone on admiring Miss Lawford for a round dozen years, talking of her as a most ladylike and remarkably well-informed person, pouring all his small grievances into her ear, confiding to her the most recondite details of any little complaint from which he happened to suffer, consulting her about his garden, his stable, his parish, it had never occurred to him that he should improve his condition or increase his happiness by making the lady his wife.

Yet, throughout this time Rhoda Lawford had always had it in her mind that if all other views failed, she could wind up fairly well by marrying the Rector. It was not at all the kind of fate she had imagined for herself years ago in the freshness of her charms; but it would be a respectable match. Nobody could presume to pity her, or say that she had done badly. The Rector was ten years her senior, so nobody could laugh at her for marrying a youth. Altogether there would be a fitness and a propriety about the alliance, which would be in perfect harmony with the elegance of her person and the spotlessness of her

character. On her fortieth birthday, Miss Lawford told herself that the time had now come when the Rector must be taken seriously in hand, and taught to see what was good for himself. A friendship which had been meandering on for the last twelve years must be brought to a head; dangling attention and old-fashioned compliments must be reduced into something more tangible. In a word, the Rector must be converted from a friend into a suitor.

It had taken Miss Lawford two years to open the Reverend Marmaduke's eyes; but at the end of those two years the thing was done, and the Rector was sighing, somewhat apoplectically, for the approach of his wedding-day, and the privilege of claiming Rhoda for his own. The whole process had been carried out with such consummate tact that Marmaduke Ferrers had not the faintest suspicion that the matrimonial card which he had drawn had been forced upon him. He believed in his engagement as the spontaneous growth of his own mind. 'Strange that I should have known you so long, my Rhoda, and only discovered lately that you were so dear to me,' he murmured in his fat voice, as he dawdled with his betrothed in one of those shadowy Warwickshire lanes which seem made for the meandering of lovers. His Rhoda smiled tenderly; and then they began to talk about the new carpet for the Rectory drawing-room, the *Sèvres garniture de cheminée* which Sir Vernon had given his sister for a wedding present, dwelling rather upon the objective than the subjective side of their position, as middle-aged lovers are apt to do.

'I hope you will not mind my keeping Todd,' said the Rector presently, pausing to recover his breath, and plucking a dog-rose in absence of mind.

'Dearest, have I any wish in opposition to yours?' murmured Rhoda, but not without a shadow of sourness in the droop of her lips, for she had a shrewd idea that so long as the Rector's housekeeper, Mrs. Todd, remained at the Rectory, nobody else could be mistress there.

CHAPTER VI.

'LOVE MAKETH ALL TO GONE MISWAY.'

Aunt Rhoda was not a person to be set at defiance, even by Daphne, who was by no means a tractable spirit. She had said, 'Come to the Rectory,' and had said it with such an air of offended dignity that Daphne felt she must obey, and promptly, lest a worse lecture should befall her. So directly after luncheon on the following day she changed her gown, and prepared herself for the distasteful visit. Madoline was going to drive to

Warwick with her father, so Daphne would have to perform her penance alone.

It was a lovely afternoon in the first week of May, the air balmy and summer-like, the meadows looking their greenest before the golden glory of buttercup time. Yonder in the reedy hollows the first of the marsh marigolds were opening their yellow cups, and smiling up at the yellow sun. The walk to Arden Rectory was something over a mile, and it was as lovely a walk as any one need care to take; through meadows, beside flowery hedgerows, with the river flowing near, but almost hidden by a thick screen of willows; and then by one of the most delightful lanes in the county, a green arcade of old elms, with here a spreading oak, and there a mountain ash, to give variety to the foliage.

Daphne set out alone, as soon as she had seen the carriage drive away from the door; but she was not destined to go her way unaccompanied. Half way down the avenue she met Mr. Turchill, strolling at a lazy pace, a cigar in his mouth, and a red setter of Irish pedigree at his heels.

At sight of Daphne he threw away his cigar, and took his hands out of his pockets.

'I was coming up to the Hill to ask somebody to play a game of billiards, and everybody seems going out,' he said.

They had known him so long in an easy-going neighbourly way that he almost took rank as a relation. Daphne, who had spent so much of her life away from home, had naturally seen less of him than anybody else; but as she had been a child during the greater part of their acquaintance, he had fallen into the way of treating her as an elder brother might have done; and he had not yet become impressed with the dignity of her advancing years. For him she was still the Daphne he had romped with in the Christmas holidays, and whose very small pony it had been his particular care to get broken.

'I met Madoline and Sir Vernon going to Warwick. Why go to Warwick? What is there for anyone but a Cook's tourist to do in Warwick? But I thought you would be at home. You haven't a bad notion of billiards, and you might have helped a fellow to while away an afternoon.'

'You are like the idle boy in the spelling-book story, wanting someone to play with you,' said Daphne, laughing at him. He had turned, and was walking beside her, the docile setter following meekly, like a dog who felt that he was of no consequence in the world now that the days of sport were done.

'Well, the hunting's all over, don't you know, and there's no more shooting, and I never cared much for fishing, and I've got such a confoundedly clever bailiff that he won't let me open my mouth on the farm. So the days do hang rather heavy on a fellow's hands.'

'Why don't you take to Alpine climbing?' suggested Daphne. 'I don't mean Mont Blanc—everybody does that—but the Matterhorn, or Monte Rosa, or something. If I were a young man I should amuse myself in that way.'

'I don't set an exaggerated value on my life, but when I do make up my mind to throw it away, I think I'll do the thing more comfortably,' replied Edgar Turchill. 'Don't trouble yourself to suggest employment for me. I'm not complaining of my life. There's a good deal of loafing in it, but I rather like loafing, especially when I can loaf in pleasant company. Where are you going, and may I go with you?'

'I am going on a duty visit to Aunt Rhoda and my new uncle. Isn't it rather dreadful to have an uncle thrust upon one in that way?'

'Well,' returned Edgar deliberately, 'I must say if I had the choosing of my relations I should leave out the Rector. But you needn't mind him. Practically he's no more to you than he was before he married your aunt.'

'I don't know,' said Daphne doubtfully. 'He may take liberties. He was always a lecturing old thing, and he'll lecture ever so much more now that he's a relation.'

'But you needn't stand his lecturing. Just tell him quietly that you don't hold with clerical interference in the affairs of the laity.'

'He got me ready for my confirmation, and that gave him a kind of hold over me,' said Daphne. 'You see, he found out the depth of my ignorance.'

'I'll wager he'd be ploughed in a divinity exam. to-morrow,' said Edgar. 'These old heathens of village parsons got their degrees in a day when the dons were a set of sleepy-headed old duffers like themselves. But don't let's talk about him. What is Madoline going to do in Warwick?'

'She and my father are going to make some calls in the neighbourhood, and I believe she has a little shopping to do.'

'Why didn't you go with them?'

'Papa does not like to have three people in the barouche. Besides, I had promised to call on my aunt. She talked to me quite awfully last night about my want of proper feeling in never having visited her in her new house.'

'Why didn't you wait till she asked you to dinner? They give capital dinners at the Rectory, but their feeds are few and far between. I don't want to say anything rude about your aunt, but she strikes me as a lady who has too keen an appreciation of the value of money to fritter it away upon other people.'

'Why don't you say at once that she's horribly stingy?' said the outspoken Daphne. 'I don't think she ever spent sixpence, except upon her own clothes, all the time she lived in my father's

house, and I know she was always getting gowns and bonnets out of Madoline. I've seen her do it. But please don't let's talk of her any more. It's rather worse than talking of him. I shall have to kiss her, and call her dear aunt presently, and I shall detest myself for being such a hypocrite.'

They had gone out by the lodge-gate by this time, the lodge with its thatched roof and dormer window, like a big eye looking out under a shaggy peut-house eyebrow; the lodge by which there grew one of those tall deodaras which were the chief glory of the grounds at South Hill. They crossed the high road, and entered the meadow-path which led towards Arden Rectory; and the setter finding himself at large in a field, frisked about a little as if with a faint suspicion of partridges.

'Oh, by-the-bye,' began Daphne, in quite a new tone, 'now that we are alone, I want you to tell me all about Lina's engagement. Is he nice?'

Edgar Turchill's face clouded over so darkly that the look seemed a sufficient answer to her question.

'Oh, I see,' she said. 'You don't like him.'

'I can't say that. He's an old acquaintance—a friend—a kind of family connection even, for his mother's grandmother was a Turchill. But to be candid, I don't like the engagement.'

'Why not, unless you know something against him?'

'I know nothing against him. He is a gentleman. He is ten times cleverer than I, ten times richer, a great deal handsomer—my superior in every way. I should be a mean cad if I couldn't acknowledge as much as that. But——'

'You think Lina ought to have accepted him.'

'I think the match in every way suitable, natural, inevitable. How could he help falling in love with her? Why should she refuse him?'

'You are talking in riddles,' said Daphne. 'You say it is a suitable match, and a minute ago you said you did not like the engagement.'

'I say so still. Can't you imagine a reason for my feelings?'

Daphne contemplated him thoughtfully for a few moments as they walked on. His frank English face looked graver than she ever remembered to have seen it—grave to mournfulness.

'I am very sorry,' she faltered. 'I see. You were fond of her yourself. I am desperately sorry. I should have liked you ever so much better for a brother.'

'Don't say that till you have seen Gerald. He has wonderful powers of fascination. He paints and poetises, and all that kind of thing, don't you know; the sort of thing that pleases women. He can't ride a little bit—no seat—no hands.'

'How dreadful!' cried Daphne, aghast. 'Does he tumble off?'

'I don't mean that. He can stick in his saddle somehow; and he hunts when he's at home in the season; but he can't ride.'

'Oh,' said Daphne, as if she were trying to understand this distinction.

'Yes, Daphne. I don't mind your knowing it—now it's all over and done with,' pursued Edgar, glad to pour his griefs into a friendly ear. 'You're my old playfellow—almost like a little sister—and I don't think you'll laugh at me, will you, dear?'

'Laugh at you!' cried Daphne. 'If I do may I never be able to smile again.'

'I asked your sister to marry me. I had gone on loving her for I don't know how long, before I could pluck up courage to ask the question, I was so afraid of being refused. And I knew if she would only say "Yes," that my mother would be the proudest woman in the county, for she positively adores Madoline. And I knew Lina liked Hawksyard; and that was encouraging. So one day, about four years ago, I got desperate, and asked the plain question in a plain way. Heaven knows how much of my happiness hung on the answer; but I couldn't have screwed any poetry out of myself to save my life. I could only tell her the honest truth—that I loved her as well as man ever loved woman.'

'Well?' asked Daphne.

'It was no use. She said "No," so kindly, so sweetly, so affectionately—for she really likes me, you know, in a sisterly way—that she made me cry like a child. Yes, Daphne, I made a miserable ass of myself. She must have despised such unmanly weakness. And then in a few minutes it was all over. All my hopes were extinguished like a candle blown out by the wind, and all my future life was dark. And I had to go back and tell the poor mother that the daughter she wanted was never to come to Hawksyard.'

'I am so sorry for you,' faltered Daphne.

'Thank you, dear. I knew you would be sympathetic. The blow was a crusher, I assure you. I went away for a few months deer-stalking in the Highlands; but lying on a mountain side in a gray mist for hours on end, not daring to move an eyelash, gives a fellow too much time for thought. I was always thinking of Madoline, and my thoughts were just two hundred and fifty miles due south of the stag when he came across, so I generally shot wild, and felt myself altogether a failure. Then I tried a month in Normandy and Brittany with a knapsack, thinking I might walk down my trouble. But I found that tramping from one badly-drained town to another badly-drained town—all infected with garlic—and looking at churches I didn't particularly want to see, was a sham kind of

consolation for a very real disappointment; so I made up my mind to come back to Hawksyard and live it down. And I have lived it down,' concluded Edgar exultantly.

'You don't care for Madoline any longer?'

'Not care for her! I shall worship her as long as I have breath in my body. But I have resigned myself to the idea that somebody else is going to marry her—that the most I can ever be to her is a good, useful, humdrum kind of friend, who will be godfather to one of her boys by-and-by; ready to ride helter-skelter for the doctor if any of her children show symptoms of measles or whooping-cough; glad to take dummy of an evening when she and her husband want to play whist; or to entertain the boys at Hawksyard for their summer holidays while she and he are enjoying a *tête-à-tête* ramble in the Engadine. That is the sort of man I shall be.'

'How good you are!' said Daphne, slipping her hand through his arm with an affectionate impulse.

'Ah, my little Daphne, it will be your turn to fall in love some of these days; put it off as long as you can, dear, for there's more pain than pleasure in it at best.' Daphne gave an involuntary sigh. 'And then I hope you'll confide in me just as freely as I have confided in you. I may be useful as an adviser, you know, having had my own troubles.'

'You could only advise me to be patient, and give up all hope,' said Daphne, drawing her hand from his arm. 'What would be the good of such advice? But I shall never trouble you. I am not going to fall in love—ever.'

She gave the last word an almost angry emphasis.

'Poor little Daphne! as if you could know anything about it,' exclaimed Edgar, smiling incredulously at her. 'That kind of thing comes upon one unawares. You talk as if you could choose whether you would fall in love or not—like Hercules between his two roads, deliberating whether he should go to the right or the left. Ah, my dear, when we come to that stage of our journey there is but one road for us: and whether it lead to the Garden of Eden or the Slough of Despond, we must travel over it.'

'You are getting poetical,' exclaimed Daphne scornfully; 'I didn't know that was in your line. But please tell me about Gerald. I have never seen him, you know. He was always at Oxford, or roaming about the world somewhere, when I was at home for the holidays. I have been at home so little, you see,' she interjected with a piteous air. 'I used to hear a great deal about a very wonderful personage, enormously rich, fabulously clever, and accomplished, and handsome; and I grew rather to hate him, as one is apt to hate such perfection; and then one day I got a letter from Lina—a letter brimming over with happiness—to say that she and this demigod were engaged to be

married, but it was to be a long engagement, because the other demigod—my father—wished for delay. So you see I know very little about my future brother.'

'You are sure to like him,' said Edgar with a somewhat regretful air. 'He has all the qualities which please women. Another man might be as handsome, or even handsomer, yet not half so sure of winning a woman's love. There is something languid, lackadaisical—poetical, I suppose Madoline would call it—in his appearance and manner which women admire.'

'I hope he is not effeminate,' exclaimed Daphne. 'I hate a womanish man.'

'No; I don't think anyone could call him effeminate; but he is dreamy, bookish, fond of lolling about under trees, smoking cigarettes and reading verses.'

'I'm certain I shall detest him,' said Daphne with conviction, 'and it will be very dreadful, since I must pretend to like him for Lina's sake. You must stand by me, Edgar, when he is at the Hill. You and I can chum together, and leave the lovers to spoon by themselves. Oh, by-the-bye, of course you haven't lived on the Avon all your life without being able to row a boat?'

'No; I can row pretty well.'

'Then you must teach me, please. I am going to have a boat, my very own. It is being built for me. You'll teach me to row, won't you, Edgar?' she asked with a pleading smile.

'I shall be delighted.'

'Thanks tremendously. That will be ever so much better than learning of Bink.'

'Indeed! And who is Bink?' asked Edgar, somewhat dashed.

'One of the under gardeners. Such an honest creature, and devoted to me.'

'I see; and your first idea was to have been taught by Bink?'

'If there had been no one else,' she admitted apologetically. 'You see, having ordered a boat, it is essential that I should learn to row.'

'Naturally.'

They had arrived at the last field by this time. The village lay before them in the sunlight: an old gray church in an old churchyard on the edge of the river, a cluster of half-timbered cottages, with walls of wattle and dab, a homestead dwarfed by rick-yard and barns, and finally the Rectory, a low, many-gabled house, half-timbered, like the cottages, a regular sixteenth-century house, with clustered chimneys of massive ruddy-brown brickwork, finished by a stone coping, in which the martens had built from time immemorial.

'I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with me,' said Daphne as they came near the stile. 'It will take the edge off my visit.'

'Oh, but I did not mean to go in with you. I only walked with you for the pleasure of being your escort.'

'Nonsense: you are going in, and you are going to stay till I go home, and you are going back with me to dinner. I'm sure you must owe Aunt Rhoda a call. Just consider now if you don't.'

Edgar, who had a guilty memory of being a guest at one of the Rector's rare but admirable dinners, just five weeks ago, blushed as he admitted his indebtedness.

'I certainly haven't called since I dined there,' he said; 'but the fact is, I don't get on very fast with your aunt, although I've known her so long.'

'Of course not. I never knew any one who could get on with her, except Lina, and she's an angel.'

They came to the stile, which was what the country people call a tumble-down stile, all the timbers of the gate sliding down with a clatter when a handle is moved, and leaving space for the pedestrian to step over. The Rectory gate stood before them, a low wide gate, standing open to admit the entrance of a carriage. The garden was lovely, even before the season of bedding-out plants and carpet horticulture. For the last twenty years the Rector had annually imported a choice selection of Dutch bulbs, whereby his flower-beds and borders on this May afternoon were a blaze of colour—tulip, hyacinth, ranunculus, polyanthus—each and every flower that blooms in the sweet youth of the year; and as a background for the level lawn with its many flower-beds, there was a belt of such timber and an inner circle of such shrubs as are only to be found in a garden that has been cultivated and improved for a century or so. Copper beeches, Spanish chestnuts, curious specimens of the oak tribe, the feathery foliage of acacia and mountain ash, the pink bloom of the wild plum, and the snowy clusters of the American crab, deodara, cypress, yew, and in the foreground arbutus and seringa, lilac, laburnum, guelder rose, with all the family of laurel, laurustinus, and bay; a shrubbery so exquisitely kept, that not a blighted branch or withered leaf was to be seen in the spacious circle which fenced and protected that smiling lawn from all the outer world.

The house was, in its way, as perfect as the garden. There were many rooms, but none large or lofty. The Rectory had all the shortcomings and all the fascinations of an old house: wide hearths and dog-stoves, high mantel-pieces, deep-recessed casements, diamond panes, leaden lattices, massive roughly-hewn beams supporting the ceilings, a wide shallow staircase, rooms opening one out of another, irregular levels, dark oak

floors, a little stained glass here and there—real old glass, of rich dark red, or sombre green, or deep dull topaz.

The house was delightfully furnished, though Mr. Ferrers had never taken any trouble about it. Many a collector, worn out before his time by the fever and anxiety of long summer afternoons at Christie's, would have envied Marmaduke Ferrers the treasures which had fallen to him without the trouble of collecting. Residuary legatee to all his aunts and uncles, he had taken to himself the things that were worth having among their goods and chattels, and had sold all the rubbish.

The aunts and uncles had been old-fashioned non-locomotive people, hoarding up and garnering the furniture of past generations. Thus had the Rector acquired Chippendale chairs and tables, old Dutch tulip-wood cabinets and bureaus, Louis Quinze commodes, Elizabethan clocks, Derby and Worcester, Bow, Bristol, Leeds, and Swansea crockery, with a sprinkling of those dubious jugs and bowls that are generally fathered on Lowestoft. Past generations had amassed and hoarded in order that the Rector might be rich in art treasures without ever putting his hand in his pocket. Furniture that had cost a few pounds when it was bought was now worth hundreds, and the Rector had it all for nothing, just because he came of a selfish celibate race. The Chippendale furniture, the Dutch marqueterie work, old china, and old plate had all been in Miss Lawford's mind when she took the Rector in hand and brought him to see her fitness for his wife.

True that her home at South Hill was as elegant, and in all things as desirable; but there was a wide difference between living under the roof of her brother, more or less on sufferance, and being mistress of her own house. Thus the humbler charms of the Rectory impressed her more than the dignity of the Hill. Sir Vernon Lawford was not a pleasant man to whom to be beholden. His daughters were now grown up. Madoline was sovereign mistress of the house which must one day be her own; and Rhoda Lawford felt that to stay at the Hill would be to sink to the humdrum position of a maiden aunt, for whom nobody cared very much.

Mrs. Ferrers was sitting in a Japanese chair on the lawn, in front of the drawing-room windows, nursing a black and white Japanese pug, and rather yearning for someone from the outer world, even in that earthy paradise where the guelder roses were all in bloom and the air was heavy with the odour of hawthorn-blossom.

'At last!' she exclaimed, as Daphne and her companion made their timorous advance across the velvet turf, mown twice a week in the growing season. 'You too, Mr. Turchill; I thought you were never coming to see me.'

'After that delightful evening with the Mowbrays and the

people from Liddington! It was too ungrateful of me,' said Edgar. 'If you call me Mr. Turchill I shall think I am never to be forgiven.'

'Well, then, it shall be Edgar, as it was in the old days,' said Mrs. Ferrers, with a faint suspicion of sentiment.

There had been a time when it had seemed to her not altogether impossible that she should become Mrs. Turchill. Hawksyard Grange was such a delicious old place; and Edgar was her junior by only fourteen years.

'I don't want you to make ceremonious calls just because you happen to have dined here; but I want you to drop in often because you like us. I want you to bring me breathings of the outside world. The life of a clergyman's wife in a country parish is so narrow. I feel hourly becoming a vegetable.'

Mrs. Ferrers looked complacently down at her tea-gown of soft creamy Indian silk, copiously trimmed with softer Breton lace, and felt that at least she was a very well-dressed vegetable. Knots of palest blue satin nestled here and there among the lace; a cluster of hot-house roses—large velvety yellow roses—reposed on Mrs. Ferrers's shoulder, and agreeably contrasted with her dark, smoothly-banded hair. She prided herself on the classic form of her small head, and the classic simplicity of her coiffure.

'I think we all belong, more or less, to the vegetable tribe about here,' said Mr. Turchill. 'There is something sleepy in the very air of our pastoral valleys. I sometimes long to get away to the stone-wall country yonder, on the Cotswolds, to breathe a freer, more wakeful air.'

'I can't say that I languish for the Cotswolds,' replied Mrs. Ferrers, 'but I should very much like a fortnight in Mayfair. Do you know if your father and Madoline are going to London this season, Daphne?'

'I think not. Papa fancies himself not quite well enough for the fatigue of London, and Lina does not care about going.'

It had been Sir Vernon's habit to take a furnished house at the West End for part of May and June, in order to see all the picture-galleries, and hear all the operas that were worth being heard, and to do a little visiting among his very select circle of acquaintance. He was not a man who made new acquaintances if he could help it, or who went to people because they lived in big houses and gave big dinners. He was exclusive to a fault, detested crowds, and had a rooted conviction that every new man was a swindler, who was destined to end his career in ignominious bankruptcy. It had gone hard with him to consent to his daughter's engagement with a man who on the father's side was a parvenu; but he had consoled himself as best he might with the idea of Lady Geraldine's blue blood, and Mr. Goring's very substantial fortune.

'And so you are no longer a school-girl, Daphne, and have come home for good,' said Mrs. Ferrers, dropping her elegant society manner and putting on a sententious air, which Daphne knew too well. 'I hope you are going to try to improve yourself—for what girls learn at school is a mere smattering—and that you are aware how much room there is for improvement—in your carriage, for instance.'

'I haven't any carriage, aunt, but papa is going to let me keep a boat,' said Daphne, who had been absently watching the little yellow butterflies skimming above the flame-coloured tulips.

'My dear, I am talking of your deportment. You are sitting most awkwardly at this moment, one shoulder at least three inches higher than the other.'

'Don't worry about it, aunt,' said Daphne indifferently; 'perhaps it's a natural deformity.'

'I hope not. I think it rests with yourself to become a very decent figure,' replied Mrs. Ferrers, straightening her own slim waist. 'Here comes your uncle, returning from his round of duty in time to enjoy his afternoon tea.'

The Rector drove up to the gate in a low park-phaeton, drawn by a sleek bay cob; a cob too well fed and lazy to think of running away, but a little apt to become what the groom called 'a bit above himself,' and to prance and toss his head in an arrogant manner, or even to shy at a stray rabbit, as if he had never seen such a creature before, and hadn't the least idea what the apparition meant. The Rector's round of duty had been a quiet drive through elm-shadowed lanes, and rustic occupation roads, with an occasional pull-up before the door of a cottage, or a farm-house, where, without alighting, he would inquire in a fat pompous voice after the welfare, spiritual and temporal, of his parishioners, and then shedding on them the light of a benignant smile, or a few solemn words of clerical patronage, he would give the reins a gentle shake and drive off again. This kind of parochial visitation, lasting for about two hours, the Rector performed twice or three times a week, always selecting a fine afternoon. It kept him in the fresh air, gave him an appetite for his dinner, and maintained pleasant relations between the pastor and his flock.

Mr. Ferrers flung the reins to his groom, a man of middle age, in sober dark livery, and got himself ponderously out of his carriage on to the gravel drive. He was a large man, tall and broad, with a high bald head, red-brown eyes of the protuberant order, a florid complexion, pendulous cheeks and chin, and mutton-chop whiskers of a warm chestnut. He was a man whose appearance, even to the stranger, suggested a life devoted to dining; a man to whom dinner was the one abiding reality of life, the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow—a memory, an actuality, a hope. He was the man for whom asparagus and

peas are forced into untimely perfection—the man who eats poached salmon in January, and gives a fabulous price for the first of the grouse—the man for whom green geese are roasted in June, and who requires immature turkeys to be fatted for him in October; who can enjoy oysters at fourpence a piece; who thinks ninety shillings a dozen a reasonable price for dry champagne, and would drive thirty miles to secure a few dozen of the late Colonel Somebody's famous East India sherry.

Rhoda had married the Reverend Marmaduke with her eyes fully opened to the materialistic side of his character. She knew that if she wanted to live happily with him and to exercise that gentle and imperceptible sway, which vulgar people call hen-pecking, she must make dinner the chief study of her life. So long as she gave full satisfaction upon this point; so long as she could maintain a table, in which the homely English virtue of substantial abundance was combined with the artistic variety of French cooking; so long as she anticipated the Rector's fancies, and forestalled the seasons, she would be sure to please. But an hour's forgetfulness of his tastes or prejudices, a single failure, an experimental dish, would shatter for the time being the whole fabric of domestic bliss, and weaken her hold of the matrimonial sceptre. The Rector's wife had considered all this before she took upon herself the responsibilities of married life. Supremely indifferent herself to the pleasures of the table, she had to devote one thoughtful hour of every day to the consideration of what her husband would like to eat, drink, and avoid. She had to project her mind into the future to secure for him novelty of diet. Todd, the housekeeper, had ministered to him for many years, and knew all his tastes: but Mrs. Ferrers wanted to do better than Todd had done, and to prove to the Rector that he had acted wisely in committing himself to the dulcet bondage of matrimony. She was a clever woman—not bookish or highly cultured—but skilled in all the small arts and devices of daily life; and so far she had succeeded admirably. The Rector, granted the supreme indulgence of all his desires, was his wife's admiring slave. He flattered her, he deferred to her, he praised her, he boasted of her to all his acquaintance as the most perfect thing in wives, just as he boasted of the sleek bay as the paragon of cobs, and his garden as the archetype of gardens.

And now for the first time Daphne had to salute this great man in his new character of an uncle. She went up to him timidly; a graceful, gracious figure in a pale yellow batiste gown, a knot of straw-coloured Marguerites shining on her breast, her lovely liquid eyes darkened by the shadow of her Tuscan hat.

'How do you do, uncle?' she said, holding out a slender hand, in a long loose Swedish glove.

The Rector started, and stared at her dumbly, whether bewildered by so fair a vision, or taken aback by the unexpected assertion of kinsmanship, only he himself knew.

'Bless my soul!' he cried. 'Is this Daphne? Why the child has grown out of all knowledge. How d'ye do, my dear? Very glad to see you. You'll stop to dinner, of course. You and Turchill. How d'ye do, Turchill?'

The Rector had a troublesome trick of asking everybody who crossed his threshold in the afternoon to dinner. He had an abiding idea that his friends wanted to be fed; that they would rather dine with him than go home; and that if they refused, their refusal was mere modesty and self-denial, and ought not to be accepted. Vainly had Rhoda lectured her spouse upon this evil habit, vainly had she tried to demonstrate to him that an afternoon visit should be received as such, and need not degenerate into a dinner-party. The Rector was incorrigible. Hospitality was his redeeming virtue.

'Thanks awfully,' replied Daphne; 'but I must go home to dinner. Papa and Lina expect me. Of course Mr. Turchill can do as he likes.'

'Then Turchill will stay,' said the Rector.

'My dear Rector, you are very kind, but I must go home with Daphne. I brought her, don't you see, and I'm bound to take her back. There might be a bull, or something.'

'Do you think I am afraid of bulls?' cried Daphne; 'why I love the whole cow tribe. If I saw a bull in one of our meadows, I should walk up to him and make friends.'

The Rector surveyed the yellow damsel with an unctuous smile.

'It would be dangerous,' he said in his fat voice, 'if I were the bull.'

'Why?'

'I should be tempted to imitate an animal famous in classic story, and swim the Avon with you on my back,' replied the Rector.

'Duke,' said Mrs. Ferrers, with her blandest smile, 'don't you think you had better rest yourself in your cool study while we take our tea? I'm sure you must be tired after your long drive. These first warm days are so exhausting. I'll bring you your cup of tea.'

'Don't trouble yourself, my love,' replied the Rector; 'Daphne can wait upon me. Her legs are younger than yours.'

This unflattering comparison, to say nothing of the vulgar allusion to 'legs,' was too much for Rhoda's carefully educated temper. She gave her Marmaduke a glance of undisguised displeasure.

'I am not so ancient or infirm as to find my duties irksome,' she said severely; 'I shall certainly bring you your tea.'

The Rector had a weakness about pretty girls. There was no harm in it. He had lived all his life in an atmosphere of beauty, and no scandal had ever arisen about peeress or peasant. He happened to possess an artistic appreciation of female loveliness, and he took no trouble to disguise the fact. Youth and beauty and freshness were to him as the very wine of life—second only to actual Cliquot, or Roederer, Clos Vougeot, or Marcobrünner. His wife was too well acquainted with this weakness. She had known it years before she had secured Marmaduke for her own ; and she had flattered herself that she could cure him of this inclination to philander ; but so far the curative process had been a failure.

But Marmaduke, though inclined to folly, was not rebellious. He loved a gentle doze in the cool shade of his study, where there were old-fashioned easy-chairs of a shape more comfortable than has ever revealed itself to the mind of modern upholsterer. The brief slumber gave him strength to support the fatigue of dressing for dinner, for the Reverend Marmaduke was as careful of the outward man as of the inner, and had never been seen in slovenly attire, or with unshaven visage.

Mrs. Ferrers sank into her chair with a sigh of relief as the Rector disappeared through the deep rustic porch. The irreproachable butler, who had grown gray in Mr. Ferrers's service, brought the tea-tray, with its Japanese cups and saucers. Edgar Turchill subsided upon a low rustic stool at Daphne's feet, just where his length of arm would enable him to wait upon the two ladies. They made a pretty domestic group : the westering sun shining upon them, the Japanese pug fawning at their feet, flowers and foliage surrounding them, birds singing, bees humming, cattle lowing in the neighbouring fields.

Edgar looked up admiringly at the bright young face above him : eyes so darkly luminous, a complexion of lilies and roses, that exquisite creamy whiteness which goes with pale auburn hair, that lovely varying bloom which seems a beauty of the mind rather than of the person, so subtly does it indicate every emotion and follow the phases of thought. Yes ; the face was full of charm, though it was not the face of his dreams—not the face he had worshipped for years before he presumed to reveal his love for the owner. If a man cannot win the woman he loves it were better surely that he should teach himself to love one who seems more easily attainable. The bright particular star shines afar off in an inaccessible heaven ; but lovely humanity is here at his side, smiling on him, ready to be wooed and won.

Edgar's reflections did not go quite so far as this, but he felt that he was spending his afternoon pleasantly, and he looked forward with complacency to the homeward walk through the meadows.

CHAPTER VII.

'HIS HERTE BATHED IN A BATH OF BLISSE.'

DAPHNE'S boat came home from the builder's at the end of three weeks of longing and expectation, a light wherry-shaped boat, not the tub-like sea-going dingey, but a neat little craft which would have done no discredit to a Thames waterman. Daphne was in raptures; Mr. Turchill was impressed into her service, in nowise reluctant; and all the mornings of that happy June were devoted to the art of rowing a pair of sculls on the rapid Avon. Never had the river been in better condition; there was plenty of water, but there had been no heavy rains since April, and the river had not overflowed its natural limits; the stream ran smoothly between its green and willowy banks, just such a lenient tide as Horace loved to sing.

When Daphne took up a new thing it was a passion with her. She was at the exuberant age when all fresh fancies are fevers. She had had her fever for water-colours, for battledore and shuttlecock, for crewel-work. She had risen at daybreak to pursue each new delight: but this fancy for the boat was the most intense of all her fevers, for the love of the river was a love dating from infancy, and she had never been able to gratify it thoroughly until now. Every evening in the billiard-room she addressed the same prayer to Edgar Turchill, when she bade him good-night: 'Come as early as you can to-morrow morning, please.' And to do her pleasure the Squire of Hawksyard rose at cockcrow and rode six miles in the dewy morning, so as to be at the boat-house in Sir Vernon's meadow before Arden church clock struck seven.

Let him be there as early as he might Daphne was always waiting for him, fresh as the morning, in her dark blue linen gown and sailor hat, the sleeves tucked up to the elbow to give free play to her supple wrists, her arms lily-white in spite of wind and weather.

'It's much too good of you,' said she, in her careless way, not ungrateful, but with the air of a girl who thinks men were created to wait upon her. 'How very early you must have been up!'

'Not so much earlier than you. It is only an hour's ride from Hawksyard, even when I take it gently.'

'And you have had no breakfast, I daresay.'

'I have had nothing since the tumbler of St. Galmier you poured out for me in the billiard-room last night.'

'Poor—dear—soul!' sighed Daphne, with a pause after each word. 'How quite too shocking! We must institute a gipsy tea-kettle. This kind of thing shall not occur again.'

She looked at him with her loveliest smile, as much as to

say: 'I have made you my slave, but I mean your bondage to be pleasant.'

When he came to the boat-house next morning he found a kettle singing gaily on a rakish-looking gipsy-stove, a table laid for breakfast inside the boat-house, a smoking dish of eggs and bacon, and the faithful Bink doing butler, rough and rustic, but devoted.

'I wonder whether she has read Don Juan?' thought Edgar. The water, the gipsy breakfast, the sweet face smiling at him, reminded him of an episode in that poem. 'Were I shipwrecked to-morrow I would not wish to awaken in a fairer paradise,' he said to himself, while Bink adjusted a camp-stool for him, breathing his hardest all the time. 'This is a delicious surprise,' he exclaimed.

'The eggs and bacon?'

'No; the privilege of a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with you.'

'Tête-à-fiddlestick; Bink is my chaperon. If you are impertinent I will ask Mr. MacCloskie to join us to-morrow morning. Sugar? Yes, of course, sugar and cream. Aren't the eggs and bacon nice? I cooked them. It was Bink's suggestion. I was going to confine myself to rolls and strawberry jam; but the eggs and bacon are more fun, aren't they? You should have heard how they frizzled and sputtered in the frying-pan. I had no idea bacon was so noisy.'

'Your first lesson in cookery,' said Edgar. 'We shall hear of you graduating at South Kensington.'

'My first lesson, indeed! Why, I fried pancakes over a spirit-lamp ever so many times at Asnières; and I don't know which smelt nastiest, the pancakes or the lamp. Our dormitory got into awful disgrace about it.'

She had seated herself on her camp-stool and was drinking tea, while she watched Edgar eat the eggs and bacon with an artistic interest in the process.

'Is the bacon done?' she asked. 'Did I frizzle it long enough?'

'It's simply delicious; I never ate such a breakfast.'

It was indeed a meal in fairyland. The soft clear morning light, the fresh yet balmy atmosphere, the sunlit river and shadowy boat-house, all things about and around lent their enchantment to the scene. Edgar forgot that he had ever cared for anyone in the world except this girl, with the soft gray eyes and sunny hair, and all too captivating smile. To be with her, to watch her, to enjoy her girlishness and bright vivacity, to minister to her amusement and wait upon her fancies—what better use could a young man, free to take his pleasure where he liked, find for his life? And far away in the future, in the remoteness of years to come, Edgar Turchill saw this lovely being, tamed and sobered and subdued into the pattern of his ideal

wife, losing no charm that made her girlhood lovely, but gaining the holier graces of womanhood and wifehood. To-day she was little more than a child, seeking her pleasure as a child does, draining the cup of each new joy like a child; and he knew that he was no more to her than the agreeable companion of her pleasures. But such an association, such girlish friendship so freely given, must surely ripen into a warmer feeling. His pulses could not be so deeply stirred and hers give no responsive throb. There must be some sympathy, some answering emotion in a nature so intensely sensitive.

Cheered by such hopeful reflections, Mr. Turchill ate an excellent breakfast, while Daphne somewhat timorously tried an egg, and was agreeably surprised to find it tasted pretty much the same as if the cook had fried it; a little leathery, perhaps, but that was a detail.

'I feel so relieved,' she said. 'I shouldn't have been surprised if I had turned them into chickens. And now, if you have quite finished we'll begin our rowing. I have a conviction that if I don't learn to feather properly to-day I shall never accomplish it while I live.'

The boat was ready for them, moored to a steep flight of steps which Bink had hewn out of the bank after his working hours. He had found odd planks in the wood-house, and had contrived to face the steps with timber in a most respectable manner, rewarded by Daphne by sweet words and sweeter looks, and by such a shower of shillings that he had opened a post-office savings-bank book on the strength of her bounty, and felt himself on the road to fortune.

There was the boat in all the smartness of new varnished wood. Daphne had given up her idea of a Pompeian red dado to oblige the boat-builder. There were the oars and sculls, with Daphne's monogram in dark blue and gold; and there, glittering in the sunlight, was the name she had chosen for her craft, in bright golden letters—Nero.

'What a queer name to choose!' said Edgar. 'He was such an out-and-out beast, you know.'

'Not a bit of it,' retorted Daphne. 'I read an article yesterday in an old volume of Cornhill, in which the writer demonstrates that he was rather a nice man. He didn't poison Britannicus; he didn't make away with his mamma; he didn't set fire to Rome, though he did play the violin beautifully. He was a very accomplished young man, and the historians of his time were silly *gobe-mouches*, who jotted down every ridiculous scandal that was floating in society. I think that Taci—— what's his name ought to be ashamed of himself.'

'Oh, Nero has been set on his legs, has he?' said Edgar carelessly, as he took the rudder lines, while Daphne bent over her sculls, and began—rather too vehemently—to feather.

'And I suppose Tiberius was a very meritorious monarch, and all those scandals about Capri were so many airy fictions? Well, it doesn't make much difference to us, does it?—except that it will go hard with me by-and-by, when my boys come to learn the history of the future, to have the young scamps tell me that all I learnt at Rugby was bosh.'

'At Rugby!' cried Daphne, suddenly earnest. 'You were at Rugby with my brother, weren't you? Were you great friends?'

Edgar leant over the boat, concerned about some weeds that were possibly interfering with the rudder.

'We didn't see much of each other. He was ever so much younger than I, you know.'

'Was he nice? Were people fond of him?'

'Everybody was dreadfully sorry when he died of scarlet fever, poor fellow!' answered Edgar, without looking at her.

'Yes, it was terrible, was it not? I can just remember him. Such a bright, handsome boy; full of life and spirits. He used to tease me a good deal, but that is the nature of boys. And then, when I was at Brighton, there came a letter to say that he was dead, and I had to wear black frocks for ever so long. Poor Loftus! How dearly I should have loved him if he had lived!'

'Yes; it would have been nice for you to have a brother, would it not?' said Edgar, still with a shade of embarrassment.

'Nice! It would have been my salvation, to have someone of my own kindred, quite my brother. I love Madoline, with all my heart and soul; but she is only my half-sister. I always feel that there is a difference between us. She is my superior; she comes of a better stock. Nobody ever talks of my mother, or my mother's family; but Lina's parentage is in everybody's mouth; she seems to be related—at least in heraldry—to everybody worth knowing in the county. But Loftus would have been the same clay that I am made of, don't you know, neither better nor worse. Blood is thicker than water.'

'That's a morbid feeling of yours, Daphne.'

'Is it? I'm afraid I have a few morbid feelings.'

'Get rid of them. There never was a better sister than Madoline is to you.'

'I know it. She is perfection; but that only makes her further away from me. I reverence her, I look up to her and admire her; but I can never feel on an equality with her.'

'That shows your good sense. It is an advantage for you to have someone to look up to.'

'Yes; but I should like someone on my own level as well.'

'You've got me,' said Edgar bluntly. 'Can't you make a brother of me for the nonce?'

'For ever and always, if you like,' replied Daphne. 'I'm

sure I've got the best of the bargain. I don't believe any brother would get up at five o'clock to teach me to row.'

Edgar felt very sure that Loftus would not have done it; that short-lived youth having been the very essence of selfishness, and debased by a marked inclination towards juvenile profligacy.

'Brothers are not the most self-sacrificing of human beings,' he said. 'I think you'll find finer instances of devotion in an Irish or a Scottish foster-brother than in the Saxon blood-relation. But Madoline is a sister in a thousand. Take care of that willow,' as the boat shot under the drooping foliage of an ancient pollard. 'How bright and happy she looked last night!'

'Yes; she had just received a long letter from Gerald, and he talks of coming home sooner than she expected him. He will give up his fishing in Norway, though I believe he had engaged an inland sea all to himself, and he will be home before the end of July. Isn't it nice? I am dying with curiosity to see what he is like.'

'Didn't I describe him to you?'

'In the vaguest way. You said I was sure to like him. Now I have an invincible conviction that I shall detest him; just because it is my duty to feel a sisterly affection for him.'

'Take care that you keep within the line of duty, and that your affection doesn't go beyond the sisterly limit,' said Edgar, with a grim smile. 'There is no fear of the other thing.'

'What a savage look!' cried Daphne laughingly. 'How horridly jealous you must be of him!'

'Hasn't he robbed me of my first love?' demanded Edgar; 'and now——'

'Don't be so gloomy. Didn't you tell me you had got over your disappointment, and that you meant to be a dear useful bachelor-uncle to Madoline's children by-and-by?'

'I don't know about being always a bachelor,' said Edgar doubtfully. 'That would imply that I hadn't got over my disappointment.'

'That is what you said the other day. I am only quoting yourself against yourself. I like to think of you as a perpetual bachelor for Lina's sake. It is a more poetical idea than the notion of your consoling yourself with somebody else.'

'Yet a man does generally console himself. It is in human nature.'

'Don't say another word,' cried Daphne. 'You are positively hateful this morning—so low and material. I'm afraid it must be the consequence of eggs and bacon, such a vulgar unæsthetic breakfast—Bink's idea. I shall give you bread and butter and strawberries to-morrow, if MacCloskie will let me have any strawberries.'

'If you were to talk a little less and row a little more, I think we should get on faster,' suggested Edgar, smiling at her.

They had got into a spot where a little green peninsula jutted out into the stream, and where the current was almost a whirlpool. The boat had been travelling in a circle for the last five minutes, while Daphne plied her sculls, unconscious of the fact. They were nearing Stratford; the low level meadows lay round them, the tall spire rose yonder, above the many-arched Gothic bridge built by good Sir Hugh Clopton before Shakespeare was born. William Shakespeare must have crossed it many and many a time, with the light foot of boyhood; a joyous spirit, finding ineffable delight in simplest things. And, again, after he had lived his life and had measured himself amidst the greatest minds of his age, in the greatest city of the world, and had toiled, and conquered independence and fame, and came back rich enough to buy the great house hard by the grammar-school, how often must he have lounged against the gray stone parapet, in the calm eventide, watching the light linger and fade upon the reedy river, bats and swallows skimming across the water, the grand old Gothic church embowered in trees, and the level meadows beyond!

They were in the very heart of Shakespeare's country. Yonder, far away to their right, lay the meadow-path by which he walked to Shottery. Memories of him were interwoven with every feature in the landscape.

'My father told me I was not to go beyond our own meadows,' said Daphne, 'but of course he meant when I was alone. It is quite different when you are with me.'

'Naturally. I think I am capable of taking care of you.'

This kind of thing went on for another week of weather which at worst was showery. They breakfasted in the boat-house every morning, Daphne exercising all her ingenuity in the arrangement of the meal, and making rapid strides in the art of cookery.

It must be confessed that Mr. Turchill seemed to enjoy the breakfasts suggested by the vulgar-minded Bink, rather more than those which were direct emanations of Daphne's delicate fancy. He liked broiled mackerel better than cream and raspberry jam. He preferred devilled kidneys to honeycomb and milk-rolls. But whatever Daphne set before him he ate with thankfulness. It was so sweet to spend his mornings in this bright joyous company. It was a grand thing to have so intelligent a pupil, for Daphne was becoming very skilful in the management of her boat. She was able to navigate her bark safely through the most difficult bits of the deep swift river. She could shoot the narrow arches of Stratford bridge in as good style as a professional waterman.

But when two young pure-minded people are enjoying them-

selves in this frank, easy-going fashion, there is generally someone of mature age near at hand to suggest evil, and to put a stop to their enjoyment. So it was in this case. The Rector's wife heard of her niece's watery meanderings and gipsy breakfasts, and took upon herself to interfere. Mr. MacCloskie, who had reluctantly furnished a dish of forced strawberries for the boat-house breakfast, happened to stroll over to Arden Rectory in the afternoon with a basket of the same fruit, as an offering from himself to Mrs. Ferrers—an inevitable half-crown tip to the head gardener, and dear at the price in the lady's opinion. Naturally a man of MacCloskie's consequence required refreshment after his walk ; so Mrs. Todd entertained him in her snug little sanctum next the pantry, with a dish of strong tea and a crusty knob of home-baked bread, lavishly buttered. Whereupon, in the course of conversation, Mr. MacCloskie let fall that Miss Daphne was carrying on finely with Mr. Turchill, of Hawksyard, and that he supposed that would be a match some of these days. Pressed for details, he described the early breakfasts at the boat-house, the long mornings spent on the river, the afternoons at billiards, the tea-drinkings in the conservatory. All this Todd, who was an irrepressible gossip, retailed to her mistress next morning, when the bill of fare had been written, and the campaign of gluttony for the next twenty-four hours had been carefully mapped out.

Mrs. Ferrers heard with the air of profound indifference which she always assumed on such occasions.

'MacCloskie is an incorrigible gossip,' she said, 'and you are almost as bad.'

But, directly she had dismissed Todd, the fair Rhoda went up to her dressing room and arrayed herself for a rural walk. Life in a pastoral district, with a husband of few ideas, will now and then wax monotonous, and Rhoda was glad to have some little mental excitement—something which made it necessary for her to bestir herself, and which enabled her to be useful, after her manner, to her kith and kin.

'I shall not speak to her father, yet,' she said to herself. 'He has strict ideas of propriety, and might be too severe. Madoline must remonstrate with her.'

She walked across the smiling fields, light of foot, buoyed up by the pleasing idea that she was performing a Christian duty, that her errand was in all things befitting her double position as near relation and pastor's wife. She felt that if Fate had made her a man she would have been an excellent bishop. All the sterner duties of that high calling—visitations, remonstrances, suspensions—would have come easy to her.

She found Madoline in the morning-room, the French windows wide open, the balcony full of flowers, the tables and mantelpiece and cabinets all abloom with roses.

'Sorry to interrupt your morning practice, dearest,' said Mrs. Ferrers as Madoline rose from the piano. 'You play those sweet classic bits so deliciously. Mendelssohn, is it not?'

'No; Raff. How early you are, Aunt Rhoda!'

'I have something very particular to say to you, Lina, so I came directly I had done with Todd.'

This kind of address from a woman of Rhoda's type generally forbodes unpleasantness. Madoline looked alarmed.

'There's nothing wrong, I hope,' she faltered.

'Not absolutely—not intentionally wrong, I trust,' said Mrs. Ferrers. 'But it must be put a stop to immediately.'

Madoline turned pale. In the days that were gone Aunt Rhoda had always been a dreadful nuisance to the servants. She had been perpetually making unpleasant discoveries—peculations, dissipations, and carryings-on of divers kinds. Not unfrequently she had stumbled upon mares'-nests, and after making everybody uncomfortable for a week or two, had been constrained to confess herself mistaken. Her rule at South Hill had not been peace. And now Lina feared that, even outside the house, Aunt Rhoda had contrived to make one of her terrible discoveries. Someone had been giving away the milk or selling the corn, or stealing garden-stuff.

'What is it, Aunt Rhoda?'

Mrs. Ferrers did not give a direct answer. Her cold gray eyes made the circuit of the room, and then she asked:

'Where is Daphne?'

'In her own room—lying down, I think, tired out with rowing.'

'And where is Mr. Turchill?'

'Gone home. He had some important business, I believe—a horse to look at.'

'Oh, he does go home sometimes?'

'How curiously you talk, Aunt Rhoda. Is there any harm in his coming here as often as he likes? He is our oldest friend. Papa treats him like a son.'

'Oh, no harm, of course, if Vernon is satisfied. But I don't wonder Daphne is tired, and is lying down at mid-day—a horribly lazy, unladylike habit, by-the-way. Are you aware that she is down at the boat-house before seven every morning?'

'Certainly, aunt. It is much nicer for her to row at that early hour than later in the day. Edgar is teaching her; she is quite safe in his care.'

'And do you know that there is a gipsy breakfast every morning in the boat-house?'

'I have heard something about a tea-kettle, and ham and eggs. Daphne has an idea that she is learning to cook.'

'And do you approve of all this?'

Madoline smiled at the question. 'I like her to be happy. I think she wastes a good deal of time ; that she is doing nothing to carry on her education ; but idleness is only natural in a girl of her age, and she has been at home such a short time, and she is so fond of the river.'

'Has it never occurred to you, Madoline, that there is some impropriety in these *tête-à-tête* mornings with Edgar Turchill ?'

'Impropriety ! Impropriety in Daphne being on friendly terms with Edgar—Edgar, who has been brought up with us almost as a brother !'

'With you, perhaps ; not with Daphne. She has spent most of her life away from South Hill. She is little more than a stranger to Mr. Turchill.'

'She would be very much surprised if you were to tell her so, and so would Edgar. Why, he used always to make himself her playfellow in her holidays, before she went to Madame Tolmache.'

'That was all very well while she was in short frocks. But she is now a woman, and people will talk about her.'

'About Daphne, my innocent child-like sister, little more than a child in years, quite a child in gaiety and light-heartedness ! How can such an idea enter your head, Aunt Rhoda ? Surely the most hardened scandalmonger could not find anything to say against Daphne.'

'My dear Madoline,' began Mrs. Ferrers severely, 'you are usually so sensible in all you do and say that I really wonder at the way you are talking this morning. There are certain rules of conduct, established time out of mind, for well-bred young women ; and Daphne can no more violate those rules with impunity than anybody else can. It is not because she wears her hair down her back and her petticoats immodestly scanty that she is to go scot-free,' added Aunt Rhoda in a little involuntary burst of malevolence.

She had not been fond of Daphne as a child ; she liked her much less as a young woman. To a well-preserved woman of forty, who still affects to be young, there is apt to be something aggravating in the wild freshness and unconscious insolence of lovely seventeen.

'Aunt Rhoda, I think you forget that Daphne is my sister —my very dear sister.'

'Your half-sister, Madoline. I forget nothing. It is you who forget that there are reasons in Daphne's antecedents why we should be most especially careful about her.'

'It is unkind of you to speak of that, aunt,' protested Madoline, blushing. 'As to Edgar Turchill, he is my father's favourite companion ; he is devoted to all of us. There can be no possible harm in his being a kind of adopted brother to Daphne.'

'He was an adopted brother to you three years ago, and we all know what came of it.'

'Pshaw! That was a foolish fancy, and is all over and done with.'

'The same thing may happen in Daphne's case.'

'If it should, would you be sorry? I am sure I should not. I know my father would approve.'

'Oh, if Vernon is satisfied with the state of affairs, I can have nothing further to say,' replied Mrs. Ferrers with dignity; 'but if Daphne were my daughter—and Heaven forbid I should ever have such a responsibility as an overgrown girl of that temperament!—I would allow no boat-house breakfastings, no meanderings on the Avon. However, it is no business of mine,' concluded Mrs. Ferrers with an injured air, having said all she had to say. 'How is your water-lily counterpane getting on?'

'Nearly finished,' answered Madoline, delighted to change the conversation. 'It will be ready for papa's birthday.'

'How is my brother, by-the-bye?'

'He has been complaining of rheumatic pains. I'm afraid we shall have to spend next winter abroad.'

'What nonsense, Lina! It is mere hypochondria on Vernon's part. He was always full of fancies. He is as well as I am.'

'He does not think so himself, aunt; and he ought to know best.'

'I am not sure of that. A hypochondriac may fancy he has hydrophobia, but he is not obliged to be right. You foster Vernon's imaginary complaints by pretending to believe in them.'

Lina did not argue the point, perceiving very plainly that her aunt was out of temper. Nor did she press that lady to stay to luncheon, nor offer any polite impediment to her departure. But the interference of starched propriety had the usual effect. Lightly as Madoline had seemed to hold her aunt's advice, she was too thorough a woman not to act upon it. She went up to Daphne's room directly Mrs. Ferrers left the house. She stole softly in, so as not to disturb the girl's slumber, and seated herself by the open window calmly to await her waking. Daphne's room was one of the prettiest in the house. It had a wide window, overlooking the pastoral valley and winding Avon. It was neatly furnished with birchwood, and turquoise cretonne, and white and gold crockery, but it was sorely out of order. Daphne's gowns of yesterday and the day before were flung on the sofa. Daphne's hats of all the week round were strewed on tables and chairs. Her sunshade lay across the dressing-table among the brushes, and scent bottles, and flower-glasses, and pincushions, and trumpery. She had no maid of her own, and her sister's maid, in whose articles of

service it was to attend upon her, had renounced that duty as a task impossible of performance. No well-drilled maid could have anything to do—except when positively obliged—with such an untidy and unpunctual young lady. A young lady who would appoint to have her hair dressed and her gown laced at seven, and come running into the house breathless and panting at twenty minutes to eight; a young lady who made hay of her cuffs and collars whenever she was in a hurry, and whose drawer of ribbons was always being upheaved as if by an earthquake. Daphne, being remonstrated with and complained of, protested that she would infinitely rather wait upon herself than be worried.

'You are all goodness, Lina dear, but half a maid is no maid. I would rather do without one altogether,' she said.

The room was not absolutely ugly, even in its disorder. All the things that were scattered about were pretty things. There were a good many ornaments, such as are apt to be accumulated by young ladies with plenty of pocket-money, and very little common sense. Mock Venetian-glass flower-vases of every shape and colour; Japanese cups and saucers, and fans and screens; Swiss brackets; willow-pattern plates; a jumble of everything trumpery and fashionable; flowers everywhere, and the atmosphere sickly sweet with the odour of tuberose.

Daphne stirred in her sleep faintly conscious of a new presence in the room, sighed, turned on her pillow, and presently sat up, flushed and towzled, in her indigo gown, just as she had come in from her boating excursion.

'Have you had a nice nap, dear?'

'Lovely. I was awfully tired. We rowed to Stratford Weir.'

'And you are quite able to row now?'

'Edgar says I scull as well as he does.'

'Then, dearest, I think you ought to dispense with Edgar in future and keep to our own meadows, as papa said he wished you to do.'

'Oh!' said Daphne. 'Is that a message from my father?'

'No, dear. But I am sure it will be better for you to consider his wishes upon this point. He is very particular about being obeyed.'

'Oh! very well, Lina. Of course if you wish it I will tell Edgar the course of lessons is concluded. He has been awfully good. It will be rather slow without him. But I was beginning to find the breakfasts a weight on my mind. It was so difficult to maintain variety—and Bink has such low ideas. Do you know that he actually suggested sausages—pork-sausages in June! And I could not make him comprehend the nauseousness of the notion.'

'Then it is understood, darling, that you row by yourself in future. I know my father would prefer it.'

'You prefer it, Lina; that is enough for me,' answered Daphne in her coaxing way. 'But I think I ought to give Edgar some little present for all his goodness to me. A smoking-cap, or a cigar-case, or an antimacassar for his mother. I could work it in crewels, don't you know.'

'You never finish anything, Daphne.'

'Because the beginning is always so much nicer. But if I should break down in this, you would finish it, wouldn't you, Lina?'

'With pleasure, my pet.'

Edgar was told that evening that his services as a teacher of rowing would no longer be required. And though the fact was imparted to him with infinite sweetness, he felt as if half the sunshine was taken out of his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

'GOD WOTE THAT WORLDLY JOY IS SONE AGO.'

PERFECT mistress of her boat, Daphne revelled in the lonely delight of the river. She felt no grief at the loss of Mr. Turchill's company. He had been very kind to her, he had been altogether devoted and unselfish, and the gipsy breakfasts in the old boat-house had been capital fun. But these delights would have palled in time; while the languid pleasure of drifting quietly down the stream, thinking her own thoughts, dreaming her own dreams, could never know satiety. She was so full of thoughts, sweet thoughts, vague fancies, visions of an impossible future, dreams which made up half her life. What did it matter that this airy fantastic castle she had built for herself was no earthly edifice, that she could never live in it, or be any nearer it than she was to-day? To her the thing existed, were it only in dreamland; it was a part of herself and of her life; it was of more consequence to her than the commonplace routine of daily existence—the dressing, and dining, and driving, and visiting.

Had her life been more varied, full of duty, or even diversified by the frivolous activity of pleasure, she could not have thus given herself up to dreaming. But she had few pleasures and no duties. Madoline held her absolved from every care and every trouble on the ground of her youth. She did not like parish work of any kind; she hated the idea of visiting the poor; so Madoline held her excused from that duty, as from all others. Her mind would awaken to the serious side of life when she

was older, her sister thought. She seemed now to belong to the flowers and butterflies, and the fair ephemeral things of the garden.

Thus Daphne, ignored by her father, indulged by her sister, enjoyed a freedom which is rarely accorded to a girl of seventeen. Her Aunt Rhoda looked on and disapproved, and hoped piously that she would come to no harm, and was surprised at Lina's weakness, and thought Daphne's bright little boat a blot upon the landscape when it came gliding down the river below the Rectory windows. The parson's rich glebe was conterminous with Sir Vernon Lawford's property, and Daphne hardly knew where her father's fields ended or where the church fields began.

Edgar Turchill, degraded from his post of instructor, still contrived to spend a considerable portion of his life at South Hill. If he was not there for lawn-tennis in the afternoon, with the Rector's wife for a fourth, he was there in the evening for billiards. He fetched and carried for Madoline, rode over to Warwick to get her a new book, or to Leamington to match a skein of crewel. There was no commission too petty for him, no office too trivial or lowly, so that he might be permitted to spend his time with the sisters.

Daphne thought this devotedness a bad sign, and began to fear that the canker was at his heart, and that he would die for love of Madoline when the fortunate Gerald came home to claim her.

'You poor creature,' she said to him one day, 'you foolish moth, why flutter round the flame that must destroy you? I declare you are getting worse every day.'

'You are wrong,' said Edgar; 'I believe I am getting cured.'

What did Daphne dream about in those languid summer mornings, as her boat moved slowly down the stream in the cool shadow of the willows, with only a gentle dip of the sculls now and then to keep her straight? Her thoughts were all of the past, her fancies were all of the future. Her thoughts were of the nameless stranger who went across the Jura last year—one little year ago—almost at this season. Her dreams were of meeting him again. Yet the chances against such a meeting reduced it almost to an impossibility.

'The world is so horribly large,' she reflected sadly, 'and I told him such atrocious stories. It will be a just punishment if I never see him any more. Yet how am I to live through my life without ever looking on his face again!'

It had gone so far as this: it seemed to her almost an absolute need of her soul that they two should meet, and know more of each other.

The ardent sensive nature had been thus deeply impressed by the first bright and picturesque image presented to the girlish

fancy. It was something more than love at first sight. It was the awakening of a fresh young mind to the passion of love. She had changed from a child to a woman, in the hour when she met the unknown in the forest.

'Who is he, what is he? where shall I find him?' she asked herself. 'He is the only man I can ever love. He is the only man I will ever marry. All other men are low and commonplace beside him.'

The river was the confidant and companion of all her dreams—the sweet lonely river, flowing serenely between green pastures, where the cattle stood in tranquil idleness, pastern deep in purple clover. She had no other ear into which to whisper her secret. She had tried, ever so many times, to tell Madoline, and had failed. Lina was so sensible, and would be deeply shocked at such folly. How could she tell Lina—whose wooing had been conducted in the most conventionally correct manner, with everybody's consent and approval—that she had flung her heart under the feet of a nameless stranger, of whom the only one fact she knew was that he was engaged to be married?

So she kept this one foolish secret locked in her own breast. The passion was not deep enough to make her miserable, or to spoil the unsophisticated joys of her life. Perhaps it was rather fancy than passion. It was fed and fostered by all her dreams. But her life was in no wise unhappy because this love lacked more substantial food than dreaming. God had given her that intense delight in Nature, that love of His beautiful earth, for which Faustus thanked his creator. Field, streamlet, wood, and garden, were sources of inexhaustible pleasure. She loved animals of all kinds. The gray Jersey cows in the marshy water meadows; the house dogs, and yard dogs, and stable terriers—supposed to be tremendous at rats, yet never causing any perceptible diminution of that prolific race; the big white horses at the farm, with their coarse plebeian tails tied up into tight knots, their manes elaborately plaited, and their harness bedizened with much brazen ornamentation; Madoline's exquisite pair of dark chestnuts, thoroughbred to the tips of their delicate ears; Sir Vernon's massive roadster; Boiler and Crock, the old carriage-horses—Daphne had an affection for them all. They were living things, with soft friendly eyes, more unvaryingly kind than human eyes, and they all seemed to love her. She was more at her ease with them than in the dimly-lighted, flower-scented drawing-room, where Sir Vernon always seemed to look at her as if he wished her away, and where her aunt worried her about her want of deportment.

With Lina she was always happy. Lina's love and gentleness never varied.

Daphne came home after a morning wasted on the river, to sit at her sister's feet while she worked, or to lie on the sofa

while Lina read to her, glad to get in the thin edge of the educational wedge in the form of an interesting article from one of the Quarterlies, or a few pages of good poetry. Daphne was a fervent lover of verse, so that it came within the limits of her comprehension. Her tastes were catholic; she worshipped Shakespeare; she adored Byron and Shelley and Tennyson, Mrs. Browning, and the simpler poems of Robert Browning; and she had heard vaguely of verses written by a poet called Swinburne; but this was all she had been permitted to learn of the latest development of the lyric muse. Byron and Tennyson, it is needless to say, were her especial favourites.

'One makes me feel wicked, and the other makes me feel good; but I adore them both,' she said.

'I don't see what you can find in Childe Harold to make you wicked,' argued Madoline, who had the old-fashioned idea, hereditary of course, that Byron was the poet of the century.

'Oh, I can hardly tell you; but there is a something, a sense of shortcoming in the world generally, an idea that life is not worth living, that amidst all that is most beautiful and sacred and solemn and interesting upon earth, one might just as well be dead; one would be better off than walking about a world in which virtue was never rightly rewarded, truth and honour and courage or lofty thoughts never fairly understood—where everything is at sixes and sevens, in short. I know I express myself horribly, but the feeling is difficult to explain.'

'I think what you mean is that Byron, even at his loftiest and best, wrote like a misanthrope.'

'I suppose that's it. Now, Tennyson, though his poetry never lifts me to the skies, makes me feel that earth is a good place and heaven better; that high thoughts and noble deeds bear their fruit somehow, and somewhere; that it is better to suffer a good deal, and sacrifice one's dearest desires in the cause of duty and right, than to snatch some brief joys out of life, and perish like the insects that are born and die in a day.'

'I am so glad you can enjoy good poetry, dear,' said Madoline, delighted at any surcease of frivolity in her young sister.

'Enjoy it! I revel in it; it is my delight. Pray don't suppose that I dislike books, Lina. Only keep away from me grammars, and geographies, and biographies of learned men, and voyages to the North Pole—there is a South Pole, too, isn't there, dear? though nobody even seems to worry about it—and you may read me as many books as you like.'

'How condescending of you, little one!' said Madoline, smiling at the bright young face looking up from the sofa-pillow, on which Daphne's golden head reclined in luxurious restfulness. 'Well, I will read to you with pleasure. It will be my delight to help to carry on your education; for though girls learn an immense number of things at school they don't seem to know

much when they come away. We will read together for a couple of hours a day if you like, dear.'

'Till Gerald comes home,' retorted Daphne; 'he will not let you give me two hours of your life every day. He will want you all to himself.'

'He can join our studies; he is a great reader.'

'Expose my ignorance to a future brother-in-law? Not for worlds!' cried Daphne. 'Let us talk about him, Lina. Aren't you delighted to think he is coming home?'

'Yes; I am very glad.'

'How do my father and Gerald get on together?'

'Not too well, I am sorry to say. Papa is fonder of Edgar than of Gerald. You know how prejudiced he is about race and high birth. I don't think he has ever quite forgiven Gerald his father's trade.'

'But there is Lady Geraldine to fall back upon. Surely she makes amends.'

'Hardly, according to papa's ideas. You see the Earldom of Heronville is only a creation of Charles the Second's reign, and his peerages are not always respectable. I believe there were scandals about the first countess. Her portrait by Sir Peter Lely hangs in the refectory at Goring Abbey. She was a very lovely woman, and Lady Geraldine was rather proud of being thought like her.'

'Although she was not respectable,' said Daphne. 'And was there really a likeness?'

'Yes; and a marked one. I can see it even in Gerald, who is the image of his mother—the same dreamy eyes, the same thoughtful mouth. But you will be able to judge for yourself when Gerald comes home, for I have no doubt we shall be going over to the Abbey.'

'The Abbey! It is a very old place, I suppose?'

'No; it was built by Mr. Goring.'

'Why Abbey? Surely that means an old place that was once inhabited by monks.'

'It was Mr. Goring's fancy. He insisted upon calling his house an abbey. It was foolish, of course; but, though he was a very good man, I believe he had a slight leaven of obstinacy in his disposition, and when once he had made up his mind about anything he was not to be turned from his purpose.'

'Perverse old creature! And is the Abbey nice?'

'It is as grand and as beautiful a place as money could make it. There are cloisters copied from those at Muckross, and the dining-room has a Gothic roof, and is called a refectory. The situation is positively lovely: a richly-timbered valley, sheltered by green hills.'

'And you are to be mistress of this magnificent place. Oh, Lina, what shall I do when you are married, and I am left

alone here *tête-à-tête* with papa? How shall I support my life?'

'Dearest, by that time you will have learned to understand your father, and you will be quite at your ease with him.'

'I think not. I am afraid he is one of those mysteries which I shall never fathom.'

'My love, that is such a foolish notion. Besides, in a year or two my Daphne may have a husband and a house of her own—perhaps a more interesting place then Goring Abbey,' added Lina, thinking of Hawksyard, which seemed to her Daphne's natural destination.

June ripened, and bloomed, and grew daily more beautiful. It was peerless weather, with just such blue skies and sunny noontides as there had been at Fontainebleau last year, but without the baking heat and the breathless atmosphere. Here there were cool winds to lift the rippling hair from Daphne's brow, and cool grass under her feet. She revelled in the summer beauty of the earth; she spent almost all her life out of doors, on the river, in the woods, in the garden. If she studied, it was under the spreading boughs of the low Spanish chestnut which made a tent of greenery on the lawn. Sometimes she carried her drawing-book to some point of vantage on a neighbouring hill, and sketched the outline of a wide range of landscape, and washed in a sky, and began a tree in the foreground, and left off in disgust. She never finished anything. Her portfolio was full of beginnings, not altogether devoid of talent: mouse-coloured cows, deep red oxen, every kind of tree and rock and old English cottage, or rick-yard, or gray-stone village church; but nothing finished—the stamp of an impetuous, impatient temper upon all.

There had been no definite announcement as to Gerald's return. He was in Sweden, seeing wonderful falls and grottoes, which he described in his letters to Madoline, and he was coming back soon, perhaps before the end of July. He had told the Abbey servants to be prepared for him at any time. This indefiniteness kept Madoline's mind in a somewhat perturbed state; yet she had to be outwardly calm, and full of thoughtfulness for her father, who required constant attention. His love for his elder daughter was the one redeeming grace of a selfish nature. It was a selfish love, for he would have willingly let her waste her life in maiden solitude for the sake of keeping her by his side; but it was love, and this was something in a man of so stern and unyielding a temper.

He liked her to be always near him, always within call, his companion abroad, his counsellor at home. He consulted her about all the details of his estate and her own, rarely wrote a business letter without reading it to her. She was wanted in

his study continually. When he was tired after a morning's business, she read the newspapers to him, or a heavy political article in Blackwood or one of the Quarterlies, were he inclined to hear it. She never shirked a duty, or considered her own pleasure. She had educated herself to be her father's companion, and counted it a privilege to minister to him.

'Faultless daughter, perfect wife,' said Sir Vernon, clasping her hand as she sat beside his sofa; 'Goring is a lucky fellow to get such a prize.'

'Why should he not have a good wife, dear father? He is good himself. Remember what a good son he was.'

'To his mother, admirable. I doubt if he and old Goring hit it quite so well. I wish he came of a better stock.'

'That is a prejudice of yours, father.'

'It is a prejudice that I have rarely seen belied by experience. I wish you had chosen Edgar. There is a fine fellow for you, a lineal descendant of that Turchill who was sheriff of Warwickshire in the reign of the Confessor. Shakespeare's mother could trace her descent from the same stock. So you see that Edgar can claim alliance with the greatest poet of all time.'

'I should never have thought it,' said Madoline laughingly; 'his lineage doesn't show itself in his conversation. I like him very much, you know, papa; indeed, I may say I love him, but it is in a thoroughly sisterly fashion. By-the-bye, papa, don't you think he might make an excellent husband for Daphne?' she faltered, with downcast eyes, as she went on with her crewel-work.

'She would be an uncommonly fortunate girl if she got him,' retorted Sir Vernon, with a clouding countenance; 'he is too good for her.'

'Oh, father! can you speak like that of your own daughter?' remonstrated Lina.

'Is a man to shut his eyes to a girl's character because she happens to bear his name?' asked Sir Vernon impatiently. 'Daphne is a lump of self-indulgent frivolity.'

'Indeed you are mistaken,' cried Lina; 'she is very sweet-tempered and loving.'

'Sweet-tempered! Yes; I know the kind of thing. Winning words, pretty looks, trivial fascinations; a creature whose movements you watch—fascinated by her variety—as you watch a bird in a cage. Graceful, beautiful, false, worthless! I have some experience of the type.'

'Father, this is the most cruel prejudice. What can Daphne have ever done to offend you?'

'Done! Is she not her mother's daughter? Don't argue with me about her, Lina. She is here beside my hearth, and I must make the best of her. God grant she may come to no harm; but I am full of fear when I think of her future.'

'Then you would be glad if Edgar were to propose for her, and she were to accept him?'

'Certainly. It would be the very best thing that could happen to her. I should only feel sorry for him. But I don't think a man who once loved you would ever content himself with Daphne.'

'He is very attentive to her.'

'*Che sara, sara!*' murmured Sir Vernon languidly.

It was Midsummer-day—the hottest, brightest day there had been yet, and Daphne had given herself up to unmixed enjoyment of the warmth and light and cloudless blue sky. Sir Vernon and Madoline had a luncheon engagement at a house beyond Stoneleigh, a drive of eleven miles each way, so dinner had been postponed from eight to half-past, and Daphne had the livelong day to herself; free to follow her own devices, free even from the company of her devoted slave Edgar, who would have hung upon her like a burr had he been at home, but who was spending a few days in London with his mother, escorting that somewhat homely matron to picture-galleries, garden-parties, and theatres, and trying to rub off a year's rural rust by a week's metropolitan friction.

Edgar was away; the light park-phaeton with the chestnuts had driven off at half-past eleven, Madoline looking lovely in a Madras muslin gown and a bonnet made of roses, her father content to loll in the low seat by her side while she managed the somewhat vivacious cobs. Daphne watched the carriage till it vanished at a curve of the narrow wooded drive, and then ran back to the house to plan her own campaign.

'I will have a picnic,' she said to herself, 'a solitary, selfish, Robinson Crusoe-like picnic. I will have nobody but Tennyson and Lina's collie to keep me company. Goldie and I will go trespassing, and find a sly secret corner in Charlecote Park where we can eat our luncheon. I believe it is against the law to stray from the miserable footpath; but who cares for law on Midsummer-day? I shall feel myself almost as brave as Shakespeare when he went poaching; and thank goodness there is no Justice Shallow to call me to order.'

She ran to her own room for a basket, a picturesque beehive basket, the very one she had carried—and he had carried—at Fontainebleau. What a foolish impulse it must have been which made her touch the senseless straw with her lips, remembering whose hand had held it! Then to the housekeeper's room to forage for provisions. The wing of a chicken; a thick wedge of pound-cake; a punnet of strawberries; a bottle of lemonade; a couple of milk-rolls. Mrs. Spicer would have packed these things neatly in white paper, but Daphne bundled them into the basket anyhow.

'Don't trouble, you dear good soul; they are only for Goldie and me,' she said.

'You may just as well have things nice, miss. There, you'd have forgot the salt if I wasn't here. And if you're going to take that there obstreperous collie you'll want something more substantial.'

'Give me a slice of beef for him then, and a couple more of your delicious rolls,' asked Daphne coaxingly. 'My Goldie mustn't be starved. And be quick, like a love, for I'm in an awful hurry.'

'Lor, miss, when you've got all the day before you! You'll be fearful lonesome.'

'What, with Goldie and the "Idylls of the King!"' exclaimed Daphne, glancing downwards at her little green cloth volume.

'Ah, well; I know when young ladies have got a nice novel to read they never feel lonesome,' said Mrs. Spicer, filling every available corner of the basket, with which Daphne stepped off gaily to summon Goldie.

Goldie was a bright yellow collie, intensely vivacious, sharp-nosed, brown-eyed; a dog that knew not what it was to be quiet; a dog you might lose at the other end of the county, confident that he would scamper home across wood and hill and valley as straight as the crow's flight. He spent half his life tied up in the stable-yard, and the other half rushing about the country with Daphne. He travelled an incalculable number of miles in the course of an ordinary walk, and was given to racing cattle. He worshipped Daphne, and held her in some awe on this cattle question; would leap into the air with mad delight when she was kind to him, or grovel at her feet when she was angry.

'Now, Goldie dear, if you and I are to lunch in Charlecote Park, I must take a strap for you,' said Daphne, as they started from the stable-yard, Goldie proclaiming his rapture by clamorous barking. 'It will never do for you to go racing the Lucy deer, or even the Lucy oxen. We should get into worse trouble than Shakespeare did, for Shakespeare had not such a frigid father as mine. I daresay old John, the glover, was an easy-going indulgent soul whom his son could treat anyhow.'

It was only a walk of two miles across the fields to Charlecote; two miles by meadows that are as lovely and as richly timbered as they could have been in Shakespeare's time. High farming is not yet the rule in Warwickshire. Hedges grow high and wild; broad oaks spread their kingly branches above the rich rank grass; dock and mallow, foxglove, fern, and dog-rose thrive and bloom beside every ditch; and many a fair stretch of grass by the roadside—a no man's land of pleasant pasture—offers space for the hawker's van, or the children's noonday sports, or the repose of the tired tramp, lying face downwards in

a rapture of rest, while the skylark trills in the distant blue above him, and the rustle of summer leaves soothes his slumber.

It is a lovely country, lovely in its simple, pastoral, English beauty, calm and fitting cradle for a great mind.

After the fields came a lane, a green arcade with a leafy roof, through which the sun-rays crept in quivering lines of light, and then the gate that opened on the footpath across Charlecote Park. Yonder showed the gray walls of the house, venerable on one side, modern on the other, and the stone single-arched bridge, and the lake, narrowing to a dull sluggish-looking stream that seemed to flow nowhere in particular. The tallest and stoutest of the elms looked too young for Shakespeare's time. But here and there appeared the ruin of a tree, hollow of trunk, gaunt of limb, whose green branches may once have sheltered the deer he stole.

The place was very lonely. There was nobody to interfere with Daphne's pleasure, or even to object to the collie, who crept meekly to her side, held by a strap, and casting longing looks at the distant oxen. She wandered about in the loneliest bits of the park, supremely indifferent to rules and regulations as to where she might go and where she might not; till she finally deposited her basket and sunshade under a stalwart oak, and sat down at the foot thereof, with Goldie still strapped, and constrained to virtue. She fastened one end of the strap to the lowest branch of the tree, Goldie standing on end licking her hands all the time.

'Now, dear, you are as comfortable as in your own stable-yard. You can admire the cows and sheep in the distance, standing about so peacefully in the sunshine, as if they had never heard of sunstroke, but you can't hunt them. And now you shall have your dinner.'

It was a very quiet picnic, perhaps even a trifle dull; though, at the worst, it might be better to picnic alone among the four-footed beasts in Charlecote Park, than to assume a forced gaiety in a party of stupid people, at the conventional banquet of doubtful lobster and tepid champagne, in one of the time-honoured haunts of the cockney picknicker. Daphne thought of Midsummer-day in the year that was gone, as she sat eating her chicken and sipping her lemonade, half of which had been lost in the process of uncorking. How gay she had been, how foolishly, unreasonably glad! And now a great deal of the flavour had gone out of life since her seventeenth birthday.

'How happy Lina looks, now that the time for her lover's return draws near!' she thought. 'She has something to look forward to, some reason for counting the days; while to me time is all alike, one week just the same as another. I am a horribly selfish creature. I ought to feel glad of her gladness;

I ought to rejoice in her joy. But Nature made me out of poor stuff, didn't she, Goldie dear?'

She laid her bright head on the collie's tawny coat. The pale gold of her soft flowing hair contrasted and yet harmonised with the ruddy hue of the dog, and made a picture fair to look upon. But there was no one wandering in Charlecote Park to paint Daphne's portrait. She was very lucky in not being discovered by a party of eager Americans, spectacled, waterproofed, hyper-intelligent, and knowing a great deal more about Shakespeare's biography than is known to the duller remnant of the Anglo-Saxon race still extant on this side the Atlantic.

She ate her strawberries in dreamy thoughtfulness, and fed Goldie to repletion, till he stretched himself luxuriously upon her gown, and dreamed of a chase he was too lazy to follow, had he been ever so free. Then she shut the empty basket, propped herself up against the rugged old trunk, and opened the 'Idylls.' It is a book to be read over and over again, for ever and ever, just one of those rare books of which the soul knows no weariness—like Shakespeare, or Goethe's Faust, or Childe Harold—a book to be opened, haphazard, anywhere.

But Daphne did not so open the volume. Elaine was her poem of poems, and it was Elaine she read to-day in that placid shade amidst green pastures and venerable trees, under a cloudless sky. Launcelot was her ideal man—faulty, but more lovable in his faultiness than even the perfect Arthur. Yet what woman would not wish—ay, even the guilty one grovelling at his feet—to be Arthur's wife?

She read slowly, pondering every word, for that fair young Saxon was to her a very real personage—a being whose sorrows gave her absolute pain as she read. Time had been when she could not read Elaine's story without tears, but to-day her eyes were dry, even to the last, when her fancy saw the barge gliding silently down the stream, with the fair dead face looking up to the sky, and the waxen hands meekly folded above the heart that had broken for love of Launcelot.

'I wonder how long his sorrow lasted,' she thought, as she closed the book; and then she clasped her hands above the fair head resting against the rugged bark of the oak, and gave herself up to day-dreams, and let the afternoon wear on as it might, in placid enjoyment of the atmosphere and the landscape.

Charlecote church clock had struck five when she plucked herself out of dreamland with an effort, unstrapped her dog from the tree, took up her empty basket, and started on the journey home. She had ample leisure for her walk. Dinner was not to be until half-past eight, and Sir Vernon and his daughter were hardly likely to be back till dinner-time.

It was a stately feast to which they had been bidden—a feast in honour of somebody's coming of age: a champagne breakfast

for the quality, roasted oxen and strong ale for the commonalty, speechifying, military bands—an altogether ponderous entertainment. Sir Vernon had groaned over the inevitable weariness of the affair in advance, and had talked of himself as a martyr to neighbourly feeling.

The homeward walk in the quiet afternoon light was delicious. Goldie, released from his strap directly they left Charlecote, ran and leapt like a creature possessed. Oh, how he enjoyed himself with the first herd they came to, scampering after innocent milch-cows, and endangering his life by flying at the foreheads of horned oxen! Daphne let him do as he liked. She wandered out of her way a little to follow the windings of her beloved river. It was between seven and eight when she despatched Goldie to his stable-yard, and went into the cool shady hall, where two old orange-trees in great green crockery tubs scented the air.

The butler met her on her way to the morning-room.

'Oh, if you please, Miss Daphne, Mr. Goring has arrived, and would like to see you before you dress for dinner. He was so disappointed at finding Miss Lawford away from home, and he would like to have a talk with you.'

Daphne looked at the tumbled white gown—it was the same she had worn last year at Fontainebleau—and thought of her towzled hair. 'I am so shamefully untidy,' she said; 'I think I had better dress first, Brooks.'

'Oh, don't, Miss Daphne. You look nice enough, I'm sure. And I daresay Mr. Goring is impatient to hear all about Miss Lawford, or he wouldn't have asked so particular to see you.'

'Of course not. No; perhaps he won't notice my untidiness. I'll risk it. Yet first impressions—— I don't want him to think me an underbred school-girl,' muttered Daphne as she opened the drawing-room door.

The room was large, and full of flowers and objects that broke the view; and all the glow and glory of a summer sunset was shining in at the wide west window.

For a moment or so Daphne could see no one; the room seemed empty of humanity. There was the American squirrel revolving in his big airy cage; there lay Fluff, the Maltese terrier, curled into a silky ball in a corner of the sofa; and that seemed all. But as Daphne went timidly towards the window, a figure rose from a low chair, a face turned to meet her.

She lifted her clasped hands to her breast with a startled cry.

'Nero!'

'Poppæa!'

CHAPTER IX.

'OF COLOUR PALE AND DEAD WAS SHE.'

'And so you are Daphne?' said Mr. Goring, taking both her hands, and looking at her with an amused smile, not without tender admiration of the fair pale face and widely-opened blue eyes. Months afterwards he remembered the scared look in those lovely eyes, the death-like pallor of the complexion; but just now he ascribed Daphne's evident agitation to a school-girl's natural discomfiture at being found out in a risky escapade.

'And so you are Daphne?' he repeated. 'Why, you told me your father was a grocer in Oxford Street. Was not that what school-boys call a crumper?'

'No,' said Daphne, recovering herself, and a sparkle of mischief lighting up her eyes; 'it was strictly true—of Martha Dibb's father.'

'And you adopted your friend's parent for the nonce; a thoroughly Roman custom that of adoption, and in harmony with your Roman name. By the way, were you christened Poppæa Daphne, or Daphne Poppæa?'

He had been amusing himself with the squirrel for the last half hour; but he found Daphne's embarrassment ever so much more amusing than the squirrel. He felt no more seriously about the one than about the other.

'Don't,' exclaimed Daphne; 'you must have known quite well from the first moment that my name wasn't Poppæa, just as well as I knew that yours wasn't Nero.'

'Well, I had a shrewd suspicion that you were romancing about the name; but I swallowed the grocer. That was too bad of you. Do you know that you made me quite unhappy? I was miserable at the idea that such a girl as you could be allied with grocery. A ridiculous prejudice, was it not, in a man whose father began life as a day-labourer?'

Daphne had sunk into a low chair by the squirrel's cage, and was feeding that pampered favourite with the green points of some choice conifer. She seemed more taken up by his movements than by her future brother in-law. Her agitation had passed, yet she was pale still, only the faintest bloom in her fair cheek, the pink of a wild rose.

'Please don't tell Lina,' she pleaded, with her eyes on the squirrel.

'Oh, she doesn't know anything about it then?'

'Not a word. I dared not tell her. When I tried to do so, I became suddenly aware how horridly I had behaved. Martha Dibb and I were silly, thoughtless creatures, acting on the impulse of the moment.'

'I don't think there was much impulse about Miss Dibb,' said Mr. Goring. 'It seemed to me that she only looked on.'

'It is disgustingly mean of you to say that!' exclaimed Daphne, recurring to her school-girl phraseology, which she had somewhat modified at South Hill.

'Forgive me. And I must really hold my tongue about our delicious picnics? Of course I shall obey you, little one. But I hate secrets, and am a bad hand at keeping them. I shall never forget those two happy days at Fontainebleau. How strange that you and I, who were destined to become brother and sister, should make each other's acquaintance in that haphazard, informal fashion! It seemed almost as if we were fated to meet, didn't it?'

'Was that the fate you read in my hand?'

'No,' he answered, suddenly grave; 'that was not what I read. Pshaw,' he added in a lighter tone, 'chiromancy is all nonsense. Why should a man, not too much given to belief in the things that are good for him to believe, pin his faith on a fanciful science of that kind? I have left off looking at palms ever since that day at Fontainebleau. And now tell me about your sister. I am longing to see her. To think that I should have stumbled on just the one particular afternoon on which she was to be so long away! I pictured her sitting by yonder bamboo table, like Penelope waiting for her Odysseus. Do you know that I have come straight through from Bergen without stopping?'

'And you have not been home to your Abbey?'

'My Abbey will keep. By-the-bye, how is the place looking—the gardens all in their beauty, I suppose?'

'I have never seen it.'

'Never! Why, I thought Lina would be driving over once or twice a week to survey her future domain. I take it positively unkind that you have never seen my Abbey: my cloisters where never monk walked; my refectory, where never monk ate; my chapel, where no priest ever said mass. I should have thought curiosity would have impelled you to go and look at Goring Abbey. It is such a charming anomaly. But it pleased my poor father to build it, so I must not complain.'

'I think you ought to be very proud of it when you consider how hard your father must have worked for the money it cost,' said Daphne bluntly.

'Yes, John Giles had to put a long career of honest labour behind him, before he became Giles Goring and owner of Goring Abbey. He was a good old man. I feel sorry sometimes that I am not more like him.'

'Lina says you are like your mother.'

'Yes, I believe I resemble her side of the house. It was by no means the more meritorious side, for the Heronvilles

were always loose fish, while my father was one of the best men who ever wore shoe-leather. Do you think Lina will be pleasantly surprised by my return?'

'Do I think it?' echoed Daphne. 'Why, she has been longing for your coming—counting every hour. I know that, though she has not said as much. I can read her thoughts.'

'Clever little puss. Daphne, do you know I am quite delighted to find that my grocer's daughter of Fontainebleau Forest is to be my new sister.'

'You are very good,' returned Daphne rather stiffly. 'It is eight o'clock, so I think, if you'll excuse me, I had better go and dress for dinner.'

'Wait till your people come home. I've ever so many questions to ask.'

'There is the carriage! You can ask them of Lina herself.'

She ran out of the room by the glass door leading into the conservatory, leaving Mr. Goring to meet his betrothed at the opposite door. She ran through the conservatory to the garden. The sun was sinking in a sea of many-coloured clouds, yonder on the edge of the hills, and the river at the bottom of the valley ran between the rushes like liquid gold. Daphne stood on the sloping lawn staring at the light like a bewildered creature.

She stood thus for some minutes motionless, with clasped hands, gazing at the sunset. Then she turned and walked slowly back to the house. There was no one to watch her, no one to think of her at this moment. Gerald and Lina were together in the drawing-room, steeped in the rapture of re-union.

'Let me be rational, let me be reasonable, if I can,' Daphne said to herself. She re-entered the house by an obscure door at the east end, and went up to her own room. There, in the soft evening light, she cast herself upon her knees by the bed, and prayed: prayed with all the fervour of her untried soul, prayed that she might be kept from temptation and led to do the thing that was right. Prayer so earnest in a nature so light and reckless was a new experience. She rose from her knees like a new creature, and fancied she had plucked the evil weed of a fatal fancy out of her heart. She moved about her room calmly and quietly, dressed herself carefully, and went back to the drawing-room, two minutes before the half-hour, radiant and smiling.

Madoline was still in the gown she had worn at the *déjeuner*. She had taken off her hat, and that was all, too happy in her lover's company to spare five minutes for the revision of her toilet. Gerald had done nothing to improve his travelling attire. Even the dust of the long railroad journey from Hull was still upon his clothes.

'Gerald tells me that you and he have made friends already, Daphne,' said Lina in a happy voice.

She was standing by her lover's side in front of the open window, while Sir Vernon sat in an easy-chair devouring his *Times*, and trying to make up for the lost hours since the post came in.

'Yes; Daphne and I have sworn eternal friendship,' exclaimed Gerald gaily. 'We mean to be a most devoted brother and sister. It was quite wonderful how quickly we broke the ice, and how thoroughly at home we became in a quarter of an hour.'

'Daphne is not a very terrible personage,' said Madoline, smiling at her sister's bright young face. 'Well, darling, had you a happy day all by yourself? I was almost glad you were not with us. The coming of age was a very tiresome business. I had ten times rather have been in our own gardens with you.'

'The whole entertainment was ineffably dull,' said Sir Vernon, without looking from his paper.

And now the well-bred butler glided across the threshold, and gently insinuated that dinner was served, if it might be the pleasure of his people to come and eat it: whereupon Mr. Goring gave his arm to Madoline, and Sir Vernon for the first time since his younger daughter's return felt himself constrained to escort her to the dining-room, or leave her to follow in his wake like a lap-dog.

He deliberated for a moment or two as to which he should do, then made a hook of his elbow, and looked down at her dubiously, as much as to say that she might take it or leave it.

Daphne would have much liked to refuse the proffered boon, but she was in a dutiful mood to-night, so she meekly slipped her little gloved hand under her parent's sleeve, and walked by his side to the dining-room, where he let her hand drop directly they were inside the door.

Everyone at South Hill hated a glare, so the dining-room, like the drawing-room, was lighted by moderator lamps under velvet shades. Two large brazen lamps with deep-fringed purple shades hung a little way above the table; two more lighted the sideboard. The French windows stood wide open, and across a balcony full of flowers appeared the shadowy landscape and the cool evening sky.

Sir Vernon was tired and out of spirits. He had very little to say about anything except the proceedings of the afternoon, and all his remarks upon the hospitalities at which he had assisted were of an abusive character. He could eat no dinner, his internal economy having been thrown altogether out of gear by the barbarity of a solid meal at three o'clock. His discontent would have effectually damped the spirits of any

human beings except lovers. Those privileged beings inhabit a world of their own; so Madoline and Gerald smiled at each other, and talked to each other across the roses and lilies that beautified the dinner-table, and seemed unconscious that anything unpleasant was going on.

Daphne watched them thoughtfully. How lovely her sister looked in the new light of this perfect happiness—how unaffectedly she revealed her delight at her lover's return!

'How good it was of you to come back a month sooner than you had promised, Gerald!' she said.

'My dear girl, I have been pining to come home for the last six months, but, as you and your father and I had chalked out a certain portion of Europe which I was to travel over, I thought I ought to go through with it; but if you knew how heartily sick I am of going from pillar to post, of craning my neck to look at the roofs of churches, and dancing attendance upon grubby old sacristans, and riding up narrow pathways on mules, and having myself and my luggage registered through from the bustling commercial city I am sick of to loathing after twenty-four hours' experience, to the sleepy mediæval town which I inevitably tire of in ten, you would be able to understand my delight in coming back to you and placid Warwickshire. By-the-bye, why didn't you take Daphne to see the Abbey? She tells me she has never been over to Goring.'

'I should have had no pleasure in showing her your house'—'Our house,' interjected Gerald—'while you were away.'

'Well, dearest, it was a loving fancy, so I won't scold you for it. We'll have a——' He paused for an instant, looking at Daphne with a mischievous smile. 'We'll have a picnic there to-morrow.'

'Why a picnic?' grumbled Sir Vernon. 'I can understand people eating out of doors when they have no house to shelter them, but nobody but an idiot would squat on the grass to dine if he could get at chairs and tables. Look at your gipsies and hawkers now—you seldom catch them picnicking. If their tent or their caravan is ever so small and stuffy they generally feed inside it.'

'Never mind the hawkers,' exclaimed Gerald contemptuously. 'A fig for common-sense. Of course, everybody in his senses knows that such a dinner as this is much more comfortable than the most perfect picnic that ever was organised. But, for all that, I adore picnics; and we'll have one to-morrow, won't we, Daphne?'

He looked across the table at her in the subdued lamp-light, smiling, and expecting to see a responsive smile in her eyes; but she was preternaturally grave.

'Just as you like,' she said.

'Just as I like! What a chilling repulse! Why, unless

Madoline and you approve of the idea, I don't care a straw for it. I'll punish you for your indifference, Miss Daphne. You shall have a formal luncheon in the refectory, at a table large enough for thirty, and groaning under my father's family plate —Garrard's, of the reign of Victoria, strictly ponderous and utilitarian. What a lovely light there is in the western sky!' said Gerald, as Madoline and her sister rose from the table. 'Shall we all walk down to the river, before we join Sir Vernon in the billiard-room? You'd like to try your hand against me, sir, I suppose, now that I come fresh from benighted lands where the tables have no pockets.'

'Yes; I'll play a game with you presently.'

Gerald and the two girls went into the verandah, and thence by a flight of shallow steps to the lawn. It was a peerless night after a peerless day. A young moon was shining above the topmost branches of the deodaras, and touching the Avon with patches of silvery light. The scene was lovely, the atmosphere delicious, but Daphne felt that she was one too many, though Madoline had linked an arm through hers. Those two had so much to talk about, so many questions to ask each other.

'And you have really come home for good,' said Madoline.

'For good, dearest; for the brightest fate that can befall a man, to marry the woman he loves and settle down to a peaceful placid life in the home of his—ancestor. I have been a rover quite long enough, and I shall rove no more, except at your command.'

'There are places I should love to visit with you, Gerald—Switzerland, Italy, the Tyrol.'

'We will go wherever you please, dearest. It will be delightful to me to show you all that is fairest on this earth, and to hear you say, when we are hunting vainly for some undiscovered nook, where we may escape from the tourist herd—"After all, there is no place like home."'

'I shall only be too much inclined to say that. I love our own country, and the scenery I have known all my life.'

'We must start early to-morrow, Lina. We have a great deal of business to get through at the Abbey.'

'Business!'

'Yes, dear; I want you to give me your ideas about the building of new hot-houses. With your passion for flowers the present amount of glass will never be enough. What do you say to sending MacCloskie over to meet us there? His opinion as a practical man might be of use.'

'If Mr. MacCloskie is going to picnic with you I'll stay at home,' said Daphne. 'I admire the gentleman as a gardener, but I detest him as a human being.'

'Don't be frightened, Daphne,' said Gerald, laughing. 'It is

a levelling age, but we have not yet come to picnicking with our gardeners.'

'Mr. MacCloskie is such a very superior person,' retorted Daphne, 'I don't know what he might expect.'

They had strolled down to the meadow by the river, a long stretch of level pasture, richly timbered, divided from the gardens by a ha-ha, over which there was a light iron bridge. They lingered for a little while by this bridge, looking across at the river.

'Do you know that Daphne has started a boat,' said Madoline, 'and has become very expert with a pair of sculls? She rowed me down to Stratford the day before yesterday, and back against the stream.'

'Indeed! I congratulate you on a delightful accomplishment, Daphne. I don't see why girls should not have their pleasure out of the river as well as boys. I've a brilliant idea. The Abbey is only five miles up the stream. Suppose we charter Daphne's boat for to-morrow. I can pull a pretty good stroke, and the distance will be easy between us two. Will your boat hold three of us comfortably, do you think, Daphne?'

'It would hold six.'

'Then consider your services retained for to-morrow. I shall enjoy the miniature prettiness of the Avon, after the mightier streams I have been upon lately.'

'I don't suppose Lina would like it,' faltered Daphne, not appearing elated at the idea.

'Lina would like it immensely,' said her sister. 'I shall feel so safe if you are with us, Gerald. What a strange girl you are, Daphne! A week ago you were eager to carry me to the end of the world in your boat.'

'You can have the boat, of course, if you like, and I'll pull if you want me,' returned Daphne, somewhat ungraciously; 'but I think you'll find five miles of the Avon rather a monotonous business. It is a very lovely river if you take it in sections, but as both banks present a succession of green fields and pollard willows, it is just possible for the human mind to tire of it.'

'Daphne, you are an absolute cynic—and at seventeen!' exclaimed Gerald, with pretended horror. 'What will you be by the time you are forty?'

'If I am alive I daresay I shall be a very horrid old woman,' said Daphne. 'Perhaps something after the pattern of Aunt Rhoda. I can't conceive anything much worse than that.'

'Papa will be waiting for his game of billiards,' said Lina. 'We had better hurry back to the house.'

They were met on the threshold of the conservatory by Mrs. Ferrers. That lady had a wonderful knack of getting acquainted with everything that happened at South Hill. If there had

been a semaphore on the roof she could hardly have known things sooner.

'My dear Gerald, what a delightful surprise you have given us!' she exclaimed. 'I put on my hat the instant the Rector had said grace. I left him to drink his claret alone—a thing that has not happened since we were married—and walked over to bid you welcome. How well you are looking! How very brown you have grown: I am so glad to see you.'

'It was very good of you to come over on purpose, Mrs. Ferrers.'

'May I not be Aunt Rhoda instead of Mrs. Ferrers? I should like it ever so much better. Next year I shall be really your aunt, you know.'

'And the Rector will be your uncle,' said Daphne pertly. 'He is mine already, and he is ever so much kinder than when I was only his parishioner.'

Mrs. Ferrers shot a piercing look, half-angry, half-interrogative, at her younger niece. The Rector had shown a reprehensible tendency to praise the girl's beauty, had on one occasion gone so far as to offer her a patriarchal kiss, from which Daphne had recoiled involuntarily, saying afterwards to her sister that 'one must draw the line somewhere.'

'Vernon has gone to bed,' said Aunt Rhoda; 'he felt thoroughly wearied out after the gathering at Holmsley, which seems from his account to have been a very dull business. I am glad the Rector and I declined. A cold luncheon is positive death to him.'

'Then we needn't go indoors yet awhile,' said Gerald. 'It is lovely out here. Shall I fetch a wrap for you, Lina?'

Mrs. Ferrers was carefully draped in her China-crape shawl, one of Madoline's wedding gifts to her aunt, and costly enough for a royal present.

'Thanks. There is a shawl on a sofa in the drawing-room.'

'Let Daphne fetch it,' interjected Mrs. Ferrers; and her niece flew to obey, while the other three sauntered slowly along the broad terrace in front of the windows.

There were some light iron chairs and a table at one end of the walk, and here they seated themselves to enjoy the summer night.

'As our English summer is a matter of about five weeks, broken by a good deal of storm and rain, we ought to make the most of it,' remarked Gerald. 'I hope we shall have a fine day for the Abbey to-morrow.'

'You are going to take Lina to the Abbey?'

'Yes, for a regular businesslike inspection; that we may see what will have to be improved or altered, or added or done away with before next year.'

'How interesting! I should like so much to drive over

with you. My experience in housekeeping matters might possibly be of use.'

'Invaluable, no doubt,' answered Gerald, with his easy-going, half-listless air; 'but we must postpone that advantage until the next time. We are going in Daphne's boat, which will only comfortably hold three,' said Gerald, with a calm contempt for actual truth which horrified Madoline, who was rigidly truthful even in the most trivial things.

'Going in Daphne's boat! What an absurd idea!'

'Don't say that, Aunt Rhoda, for it's my idea,' remonstrated Gerald.

'But I can't help saying it. When you have half-a-dozen carriages at your disposal, and when the drive to Goring is absolutely lovely, to go in a horrid little boat.'

'It is a very nice boat, Aunt Rhoda, and Daphne manages it capitally,' said Lina.

'I think it will be a delightfully dreamy way of going,' said Gerald. 'We shall take our time about it. There is no reason we should hurry. I shall order a carriage to meet us at the bottom of Goring Lane, where we shall land. If we prefer to drive home we can do so.'

'My dear Gerald, you and Madoline are the best judges of what is agreeable to yourselves; but I cannot help thinking that you are encouraging Daphne in a most unbecoming pursuit.'

The appearance of Daphne herself with the shawl put a stop to the argument. She folded the soft woollen wrap round her sister, and then stooped to kiss her.

'Good-night, Lina,' she said.

'Going to bed so early, Daphne? I hope you are not ill.'

'Only a little tired after my rambles. Good-night, Aunt Rhoda; good-night, Mr. Goring,' and Daphne ran away.

'Aunt Rhoda might drive over and meet us at Goring, Gerald,' suggested Madoline, who was always thoughtful of other people's pleasure and did not wish her aunt to fancy herself ignored.

'Certainly. I shall be charmed, if you think it worth your while,' said Gerald.

'Then I shall certainly come. My ponies want exercise, and to-morrow is one of the Rector's pastoral days, so he won't miss me or an hour or two. What time do you contemplate arriving at the Abbey?'

'Oh, I suppose between one and two, the orthodox luncheon-hour,' answered Gerald.

Daphne was up and dressed before five o'clock next morning. She had set her little American alarum-clock for five; but that had been a needless precaution, since she had not slept above a quarter of an hour at a time all through the short summer

night. She had seen the last glimmer of the fading moon, the first faint glow of sunlight flickering on her wall. She stole softly downstairs, unlocked doors and drew bolts with the silent dexterity of a professional housebreaker, feeling almost as guilty as if she had been one ; and in the cool quiet morning, while all the world beside herself seemed asleep, she ran lightly across the dewy lawn, down to the iron bridge by which she had stood with Madoline and Gerald last night. Then she crossed the meadow, wading ankle-deep in wet grass, and scaring the placid kine, and thus to the boat-house.

She went in and got into her boat, which was drawn up under cover, and carefully protected by linen clothing. She whisked the covering off, and seated herself on the floor of the boat in front of the place of honour, above which appeared the name of the craft, in gilded letters on the polished pine—'Nero.'

She took out her penknife and began carefully, laboriously, to scrape away the gilt lettering. The thing had been so conscientiously done, the letters were so sunk and branded into the wood, that the task seemed endless ; she was still digging and and scraping at the first letter when Arden church clock struck six, every stroke floating clear and sweet across the river.

'What—an—utter—idiot I was!' she said to herself, in an exasperated tone, emphasising each word with a savage dig of her knife into the gilded wood. 'And how shall I ever get all these letters out before breakfast time?'

'Why attempt it?' asked a low pleasant voice close at hand, and Daphne, becoming suddenly aware of the odour of tobacco mixed with the perfumes of a summer meadow, looked up and saw Gerald Goring lounging against the door-post, smoking a cigarette.

'Why erase the name?' he asked. 'It is a very good name—classical, historical, and not altogether inappropriate. Nero was a boat-builder himself, you know.'

'Was he?' said Daphne, sitting limply in the bottom of her boat, completely unnerved.

'Yes ; the vessel he built was a failure, or at any rate the result of his experiment was unsatisfactory, but the intention was original, and deserves praise. I am sorry you have spoilt the first letter of his name.'

'Don't distress yourself,' exclaimed Daphne, jumping up and stepping briskly out of her boat. 'I am going to change the name of my boat, and I thought I could do it this morning as a surprise for Lina ; but it was a more difficult business than I supposed. And now I must run home as fast as I can, and make myself tidy for breakfast. My father is the essence of punctuality.'

'But as half-past eight is his breakfast hour you need not

be in a desperate hurry. It has only just struck six. Will you come for a stroll?'

'No, thank you. I have ever so much to do before breakfast.'

'Czerny's "Studies of Velocity"?'

'No.'

'French grammar?'

'No.'

'Be sure you are ready to start directly after breafast.'

Daphne scampered off through the wet grass, leaving Mr. Goring standing by the boat-house door, looking down with an amused smile at the mutilated name.

CHAPTER X.

'AND SPENDING SILVER HAD HE RIGHT YNOW.'

At ten o'clock Daphne was down at the boat-house again, ready for the aquatic excursion, looking as fresh and bright as if nothing had ever occurred to vex her. She wore a workmanlike attire of indigo serge—no gay fluttering scarlet ribbons this time. Her whole costume was studiously plain, from the sailor hat to the stout Cromwell shoe and dark blue stocking, the wash-leather glove and leathern belt with a broad steel buckle. Madoline's flowing muslin skirts and flowery hat contrasted charmingly with her sister's more masculine attire.

'This looks like business,' said Gerald, as Bink ran the boat into the water, and held her while the ladies stepped on board. 'Now, Daphne, whichever of us gets tired first must forfeit a dozen pairs of gloves.'

'I think it will be you, from the look of you,' returned Daphne, as she rolled up her sleeves and took hold of an oar in an off-hand waterman-like manner. 'When you are tired I'll take the sculls.'

'Well, you see I am likely to be in very bad form. It is four years since I rowed in the 'Varsity race.'

'What, you rowed in the great race? What affectation to talk about being in bad form. I should think a man could never forget training of that kind.'

'He can never forget the theory, but he may feel the want of practice. However, I fancy I shall survive till we get to Goring Lane, and that you'll win no gloves to-day. I suppose you never wear anything less than twelve buttons?'

'Madoline gives me plenty of gloves, thank you,' replied Daphne with dignity. 'My glove-box is not supported by voluntary contributions.'

'Daphne, do you know that for a young woman who is speedily to become my sister you are barely civil?' said Gerald.

'I beg your pardon, I am practising a sisterly manner. I never met with a brother and sister yet who were particularly civil to each other.'

They were rowing quietly up the stream, lowering their heads now and then to clear the drooping tresses of a willow. The verdant banks, the perpetual willows, were beautiful, but with a monotonous beauty. It was the ripe middle of the year, when all things are of one rich green—meadows and woods and hills—and in a country chiefly pastoral there must needs be a touch of sameness in the landscape. Here and there a spire showed above the trees, or a gray stone mansion stood boldly out upon the green hillside.

Daphne had so arranged cushions and wraps upon the principal seat as to conceal the mutilated name. Gerald rowed stroke, she sat in the bows, and Madoline reclined luxuriously in the stern with the Maltese terrior Fluff in her lap.

'If we are lucky we shall be at the Abbey an hour and a half before your aunt and her ponies,' said Gerald. 'It was extremely obliging of her to volunteer the inestimable boon of her advice, but I fancy we should get on quite as well without her.'

'It would have been unkind to let her think we didn't want her,' said Madoline deprecatingly.

'That is so like you, Lina; you will go through life putting up with people you don't care about, rather than wound their feelings,' said Gerald carelessly.

'Aunt Rhoda is my father's only sister. I am bound to respect her.'

'I've no doubt the Old Man of the Sea was a very estimable person in the abstract,' said Gerald, 'but Sindbad shunted him at the first opportunity. Don't look so distressed, dearest. Aunt Rhoda shall patronise us, and dictate to us all our lives, if it please you. By-the-bye, what has become of your devoted slave and ally, Turchill? I expected to find him on the premises when I arrived at South Hill.'

'He went up to London last week with his mother, to make a round of the theatres and picture-galleries. They will be home in a few days, I daresay.'

'I wonder he can exist out of Warwickshire. He is so thoroughly bucolic, so permeated by the flavour of his native soil.'

'He is very kind and good and true-hearted,' protested Daphne, flushing indignantly; 'and he is your old friend and kinsman. I wonder you can speak so contemptuously of him, Mr. Goring.'

'What, my vixenish little Pop—Daphne,' cried Gerald,

colouring at this slip of the tongue, 'is it thus the cat jumps? I would not underrate Edgar for worlds. He is out and away the best fellow I know; but, however much you may admire him, little one, that his mind is essentially bucolic is a fact—and facts are stubborn things.'

'You have no right to say that I admire him. I respect and esteem him, and I am not ashamed to own as much, though you may think it a reason for laughing at me,' retorted Daphne, still angry. 'He taught me to row this very boat. He used to get up every morning at a ridiculously early hour, in order to be at South Hill in time to give me a lesson before breakfast.'

'A man might do twice as much for your *beaux yeux*, and yet deem it no self-sacrifice.'

'Don't,' cried Daphne. 'Didn't I tell you ages ago that I detest you when you flatter me?'

Madoline looked up with momentary wonder at that expression 'ages ago;' but Daphne was so given to wild exaggerations and a school-girl latitude of phrase, that 'ages ago' might naturally mean yesterday.

'Daphne dearest, what has put you out of temper?' she asked gently. 'I'm afraid you're getting tired.'

'If she give in before we get to Goring Lane I shall claim a dozen pairs of gloves.'

'I am not the least little bit tired; I could row you to Naseby, if you liked,' replied Daphne haughtily; whereupon the lovers began to talk of their own affairs, somewhat lazily, as suited the summer morning and the quiet landscape, where a light haze that yet lingered over the fields seemed the cool and misty forecast of a blazing afternoon.

Goring Lane was an accommodation road, leading down from the home farm to the meadows on the river bank, and here they found a light open carriage and a pair of strong country-made gray horses waiting for them.

Gerald had sent his valet over before breakfast to make all arrangements for their reception. The man was waiting beside the carriage, and to Daphne's horror she beheld in him the grave gentleman in gray who had helped to convey provisions for the Fontainebleau picnic: but not a muscle of the valet's face betrayed the fact that he had ever seen this young lady before.

At the end of the lane they came into a shady park-like avenue, and then to a gray stone gateway, pillared, mediæval, grandiose; on the summit of each granite pillar a griffin of the most correct heraldic make grasped a shield, and on the shield were quarterings that hinted at a palmer's pilgrimage in the Holy Land, and a ragged staff that suggested kindred with the historic race of Dudley.

The lodge-keeper's wife and her three children were standing by the open gate, ready to duck profusely in significance of delight in their lord's return. The male bird as usual was absent from the nest. Nobody ever saw a man at an entrance lodge.

The avenue of limes was of but thirty years' growth, but there was plenty of good old timber on the broad expanse of meadow-land which Mr. Goring had converted into a park. There was a broad blue lake in the distance, created by the late Mr. Goring, an island in the middle of it, also of his creation; while a fleet of rare and costly foreign aquatic birds of Mr. Goring's importation were sailing calmly on the calm water. And yonder, in the green valley, with a wooded amphitheatre behind it, stood the Abbey, built strictly after the fashion of the fifteenth century, but every block of stone and every lattice obviously of yesterday.

'It wouldn't be half a bad place if it would only mellow down to a sober grayness, instead of being so uncomfortably white and dazzling,' said Gerald as they drew near the house.

'It is positively lovely,' answered Madoline.

She was looking at the gardens, which thirty years of care and outlay had made about as perfect as gardens of the Italian style can be. They were not such old English gardens as Lord Bacon wrote about. There was nothing wild, no intricate shrubberies, no scope for the imagination, as there was at South Hill. All was planned and filled in with a Dutch neatness. The parterres were laid out in blocks, and in the centre of each rose a fountain from a polished marble basin. Statues by sculptors of note were placed here and there against a background of tall orange-trees, arbutus, or yew. Everything was on a large scale, which suited this palatial Italian manner. Such a garden might have fitly framed the palace of a Medici or a Borgia; nay, in such a garden might Horace have walked by the side of Mæcenas, or Virgil recited a portion of his Æneid to Augustus and Octavia. There was a dignity, a splendour, in these parterres which Daphne thought finer than anything she had seen even at Versailles, whither Madame Tolmache had escorted her English pupils on a certain summer holiday.

'The rose garden will please you better than this formal pleasaunce, I daresay,' said Gerald. 'It is on the other side of the house, and consists wholly of grass walks and rose-trees. My dear mother gave her whole mind to the cultivation and improvement of her gardens. I believe she was rather extravagant in this one matter—at least, I have heard my father say so. But I think the result justified her outlay.'

'And yet you want to build more hot-houses on my account,

Gerald. Surely arrangements that satisfied Lady Geraldine will be good enough for me,' said Madoline.

'Oh, one ought to go on improving. Besides, you are fonder of exotics than my mother was. And the rage for church decoration is getting stronger every day. You will have plenty of use for your hot houses. And now we will go and take a sketchy survey of the house, before we interview the worthy MacCloskie. Has Miss Lawford's gardener arrived?' Gerald asked of the gentleman in gray, who had occupied the box-seat, and was again in attendance at the carriage-door, while a portly butler and a powdered footman, both of the true English pattern, waited in the Gothic porch.

'Yes, sir; Mr. MacCloskie is in the housekeeper's room.'

'I hope they have given him luncheon.'

'No, sir, thank you, sir. He would take nothing but a glass of claret and a cigar. He has taken a stroll round the gardens, sir, so as to be prepared to give an opinion.'

The house was deliciously cool, almost as if ice had been laid on in the pipes which were used in winter for hot water. The hall was as profoundly Gothic as that at Penshurst—it was difficult to believe that the reek of a log fire piled in the middle of the stone floor had never gone up through yonder rafters, that the rude vassals of a feudal lord had never squatted by the blaze, or slept on yonder ponderous oaken settles. Nothing was wanting that should have been there to tell of an ancient ancestry. Armour that had been battered and dented at Cressy or Bannockburn, or at any rate most skilfully manipulated at Birmingham, adorned the walls. Banners drooped from the rafters; heads of noble stags that had been shot in Arden's primeval wood, spears and battle-axes that had been used in the Crusades, and collected in Wardour Street, gave variety to the artistic decoration of the walls, while tapestry of undoubted antiquity hung before the doorways.

These things had given pleasure to Mr. Giles-Goring, but to his son they were absolutely obnoxious. Yet the father had been so good a father, and had done such honest and useful work in the world before he began to amass this trumpery, that the son had not the heart to dislodge anything.

They went through room after room—all richly furnished, all strictly mediæval: old oak carving collected in the Low Countries; cabinets that reached from floor to ceiling; sideboards large enough to barricade a Parisian boulevard; all the legends of Holy Writ exemplified by the patient Fleming's chisel; polished oaken floors; panelled walls. The only modern rooms were those at one end of the Abbey, which had been refurnished by Lady Geraldine during her widowhood, and here there was all the lightness and grace of modern upholstery of the highest order. Satinwood furniture and pale-tinted draperies; choice

water-colours and choicer porcelain on the walls ; books in every available nook.

'How lovely!' cried Daphne, who had not been impressed by the modern mediævalism of the other rooms. 'This is where I should like to live.'

Lady Geraldine's morning-room looked into the rose-garden. She had not been able to do away with the mullioned windows, but a little glass door—an anachronism, but vastly convenient—had been squeezed into a corner to give her easy access to her favourite garden.

Madoline looked at everything with tender regard. Lady Geraldine had been fond of her and kind to her, and had most heartily approved her son's choice. Tears dimmed Lina's sight as she looked at the familiar room, which seemed so empty without the gracious figure of its mistress.

'I fancied you would like to occupy these rooms by-and-by, Lina,' said Gerald.

'I should like it of all things.'

'And can you suggest any alterations — any improvements?'

'Gerald, do you think that I would change a thing that your mother cared for? The rooms are lovely in themselves ; but were they ever so old-fashioned or shabby, I should like them best as your mother left them.'

'Lina, you are simply perfect!' exclaimed Gerald tenderly. 'You are just the one faultless woman I have ever met. Chaucer's Grisel was not a diviner creature.'

'I hope you are not going to try my sister as that horrid man in the story tried Grisel,' cried Daphne, bristling with indignation. 'I only wish I had lived in those days, and had the reversion of Count Walter, as a widower. I'd have made him repent his brutality.'

'I have no doubt you would have proved skilful in the art of husband-government,' said Gerald. 'But you needn't be alarmed. Much as I admire Grisel I shan't try to emulate her husband. I could not leave my wife in agony, and walk away smiling at the cleverness of my practical joke. Well, Lina, then it is settled that in these rooms there is to be no alteration,' he added, turning to Madoline, who had been taking up the volumes on a little ebony bookstand and looking at their titles.

'Please make no alteration anywhere. Let the house be as your father and mother arranged it.'

'My sweet conservative! And we are to keep all the old servants, I conclude. They are all of my father's and mother's choosing.'

'Pray keep them all. If you could any way find room for MacCloskie, without offending your head gardener——'

'MacCloskie shall be superintendent of your own special hot-

houses, my darling. It will be an easy, remunerative place—good wages and plenty of perquisites.'

A grinding of wheels on the gravel, and a tremendous peal of the bell at the principal entrance proclaimed the advent of a visitor.

'Aunt Rhoda, no doubt,' said Gerald. 'Let us be sober.'

They went back to the hall to greet the new arrival. It was Mrs. Ferrers's youthful groom, a smart young gentleman of the tiger species, who had made that tremendous peal. Mrs. Ferrers's roan ponies were scratching up the gravel; but Mrs. Ferrers was not alone: a gentleman had just dismounted from a fine upstanding bay, and that gentleman was Edgar Turchill.

'So glad to see you here, Aunt Rhoda,' cried Gerald. 'Why, Turchill, they told me you were in London!'

'Came home last night, rode over to South Hill this morning, overtook Mrs. Ferrers on the way, and——'

'I asked him to come on with me and to join in our round of inspection,' said Aunt Rhoda. 'I hope I did not do very wrong.'

'You did very right. I don't think Turchill feels himself much of a stranger at the Abbey, even though it has been a very inhospitable place for the last year or so. And now before we go in for any more business let's proceed to luncheon. Your boat has had a most invigorating effect on my appetite, Daphne. I'm simply famished.'

'So you came in Daphne's boat. She rows pretty well, doesn't she?' asked Edgar, with a glance of mingled pride and tenderness at his pupil.

'She might win a cup to-morrow. You have reason to be proud of her.'

They all went into the refectory, where, under the lofty open timber roof, a small oval table looked like an island in a sea of Turkey carpet and polished oak flooring.

'It would have served you right if we had had the long dinner-table,' Gerald said to Daphne, as he passed her with Mrs. Ferrers on his arm.

'I thought we were going to picnic in the park,' said Madoline.

'Daphne—— Neither you nor Daphne seemed to care about it,' replied Gerald.

'This is a great deal more sensible,' remarked Mrs. Ferrers.

'Oh, I don't know; it's awfully jolly to eat one's luncheon under the trees in such weather as this,' said Edgar.

'For Mr. Turchill's particular gratification, we will have afternoon-tea in the cloisters,' said Gerald. 'Blake,' to the butler, 'let there be tea at half-past four on the grass in the cloisters.'

Daphne could eat or drink very little, though Edgar, who

sat next to her, was pressing in his offers of lobster mayonnaise, and cold chicken, cutlets, sole à la maître d'hôtel, Périgord pie. She was looking about her at the portraits on the walls.

Facing her hung Prescott Knight's picture of the man who began his career by wheeling barrows, and who ended it by building mighty viaducts, levelling hills, filling valleys, making the crooked paths straight. It was a brave honest English face, plain, rugged even, the painter having in no wise flattered his sitter; but a countenance that was pleasanter to the eye than many a handsome face. A countenance that promised truth and honour, manliness and warm feelings in its possessor.

Daphne looked from the portrait on the wall to the present master of the Abbey. No; there was not one point of resemblance between Gerald Goring and his father.

Then she looked at another portrait hanging in the place of honour above the wide Gothic mantelpiece. Lady Geraldine, by Buckner: the picture of an elegant highbred woman of between thirty and forty, dressed in amber satin and black lace, one bare arm lifted to pluck a rose from a lattice, the other hand resting on a marble balustrade, across which an Indian shawl had been flung carelessly. Face and figure were both perfect after their kind—figure tall and willowy, a swan's neck, a proud and pensive countenance, with eyes of the same doubtful colour as Gerald's, the same dreamy look in them. Then Daphne turned her gaze to the other end of the room, where hung the famous Sir Peter Lely, a replica of the well-known picture in Hampton Court, for which replica Mr. Giles-Goring had paid a preposterous price to a poor and proud member of his wife's family, who was lucky enough to possess it. Strange that a single-minded, honest-hearted man like John Giles-Goring should have been proud of his son's descent from a king's mistress, and should have hung the portrait of Felicia, Countess of Heronville, above the desk at which he read family prayers to his assembled household. Yes; Lady Heronville's eyes were like Gerald's, dreamily beautiful.

Everybody at the table had plenty to say, except Daphne. She was absorbed by her contemplation of the pictures. Edgar was concerned at her want of appetite. He tried to entertain her by telling her of the plays and pictures he had seen.

'Your father ought to take you to town before the season is over. There is so much to see,' he said; 'and though I am told that all the West End tradespeople are complaining, it seems to me that London was never so full as this year. Hyde Park in the morning and afternoon is something wonderful.'

'I should like to go to the opera,' said Daphne rather listlessly. 'Madame Tolmache took us to hear "Faust" one evening. She said that an occasional visit to the opera was the highest form of cultivation for the youthful mind. I believe

she had a box given her by the music-master, and that she turned it to her own advantage that way—charging it in her bills, don't you know. I shall never forget that evening. It was at the end of August, and Paris was wrapped in a white mist, and the air had a breathless, suffocating feeling, and the streets smelt of over-ripe peaches. But when we got out of the jolting fly that took us from the station to the theatre, and went to a box that seemed in the clouds, we had to go up so many stairs to reach it, and the music began, and the curtain went up, it was like being in a new world. I felt as if I were holding my breath all the time. Even Martha Dibb—that stupid, good-natured girl I told you about—seemed spell-bound, and sat with her mouth open, gasping like a fish. Nilsson was Marguerite, and Faure was Mephistopheles. I shall remember them to the end of my life.'

'You'll hear them again often, I hope. Nilsson was singing the other night, when I took my mother to hear Wagner's great opera. The music is quite the rage, I believe; but I don't like it as well as "Don Giovanni."'

Luncheon was over by this time—a formal ceremonious luncheon, such as Daphne detested. It was her punishment for having been uncivil last night when the picnic idea was mooted. And now they all repaired to the gardens, and perambulated the parterre, and criticised the statues: Leda with her swan, Venus with an infant Cupid, Hebe offering her cup, Ganymede on his eagle—all the most familiar personages in Lemprière. The fountains were sending up their rainbow spray in the blazing afternoon sun. The geraniums, and calceolarias, and pansies, and petunias, and all the tribe of begonias, and house-leeks, newly bedded out, seemed to quiver in the fierce bright light.

'For pity's sake let us get out of this burning flowery furnace,' cried Gerald. 'Let's go to the rose-garden; it's on the shady side of the house, and within reach of my mother's favourite tulip-trees.'

The rose-garden was a blessed refuge after that exposed parterre facing due south. Here there was velvet turf on which to walk, and here were trellised screens and arches wreathed with the yellow clusters of the Celine Forestier, and the Devoniensis. Mrs. Ferrers was a person who always discoursed of flowers by their botanical or fashionable names. She did not call a rose a rose, but went into raptures over a Marguerite de St. Armand, a Garnet Wolseley, a Gloire de Vitry, or an Etienne Levet, as the case might be.

Here, smoking his cigar, which he politely suppressed at their approach, they discovered Mr. MacCloskie, the hard-faced, sandy-haired Scottish gardener.

'You have been taking a look at my grounds, I hear, MacCloskie,' Mr. Goring said pleasantly.

'Yes, sir; I've looked about me a bit. I think I've seen pretty well everything.'

'And the hot-houses leave room for improvement, I suppose?'

'Well, sir, I'm not wishing to say anything disrespectful to your architect,' began MacCloskie, with that deliberation which gave all his speeches an air of superior wisdom, 'but if he had tried his hardest to spend the maximum of money in attaining the minimum of space and accommodation—to say nothing of his ventilation and his heating apparatus, which are just abominable—he couldn't have succeeded better than he has—unconsciously.'

'Dear me, Mr. MacCloskie, that's a bad account. And yet the gardeners here have managed to rub on very decently for a quarter of a century, with no better accommodation than you have seen to-day.'

'Ay, sir, that's where it is. They just roobed on, poor fellows. And I can only say that it's very creditable to them to do as well as they have done, and if they're about a quarter of a century behind the times nobody can blame them.'

'Then we must build new houses—that's inevitable, I conclude.'

'Yes, sir, if you want to grow exotics.'

'Yet I used to see a good deal of stephanotis about the rooms in my father's time.'

'Ay, there's a fine plant growing in a bit of a glass—shed,' said Mr. MacCloskie with ineffable contempt. 'Necessity's the mother of invention, Mr. Goring. Your gardeners have done just wonders. But with all deference to you, sir, that kind of thing wouldn't suit me. And if Miss Lawford has any idea of my coming here by-and by——' with a respectful glance at his mistress, as he stood at ease, contemplating the spotless lining of his top-hat.

'Miss Lawford would like you to continue in her service when she is Mrs. Goring. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me an exact specification of the space you would require, and the form of house you would suggest. I wish Miss Lawford to be in no way a loser when she exchanges South Hill for Goring Abbey.'

'Thank you, sir, you are very good, sir,' murmured the Scotchman, as if it were for his gratification the houses were to be built. 'This is a very fine place, sir; it would be a pity if it were to be behind the times in any particular.'

The head gardener bowed and withdrew, everyone—even Aunt Rhoda—breathing more freely when he had vanished.

'Isn't he too utterly horrid?' asked Daphne. 'If there is a being I detest in this world it is he. Were I in Lina's place I should take advantage of my marriage to get rid of him; but

she will just go down to her grave domineered over by that man,' concluded Daphne, mimicking MacCloskie's northern tongue.

'He is not the most agreeable person in the world,' said Lina; 'but he is thoroughly conscientious.'

'Did you ever know a disagreeable person who did not set up for being a paragon of honesty?' exclaimed Daphne contemptuously.

They roamed about the rose-garden, which was a lovely place to loiter in upon a summer day, and lingered under the tulip-trees, where there were rustic chairs and a rustic table, and every incentive to idleness. Beyond the tulip-trees there was a shrubbery on the slope of the hill, a shrubbery which sheltered the rose-garden from bleak winds, and made it a thoroughly secluded spot. While the rest of the party sat talking under the big broad-leaved trees, Daphne shot off to explore the shrubbery. The first thing that attracted her attention was a large wire cage among the laurels.

'Is that an aviary?' she asked.

'No,' answered Gerald, rising and going over to her. 'These are my father's antecedents.'

He pulled away the laurel branches which had spread themselves in front of the cage, and Daphne saw that it contained only a shabby old barrow, a pickaxe, and shovel.

'Those were the stock-in-trade with which my father began his career,' he said. 'I don't believe he had even the traditional half-crown. I've no doubt if he had possessed such a coin his mates would have made him spend it on beer. He began life, a barefooted, ignorant lad, upon a railroad in the north of England; and before his fortieth birthday he was one of the greatest contractors and one of the best-informed men of his time; but he never mastered the right use of the aspirate, and he never could bring himself to wear gloves. It was his fancy to keep these old tools of his, and to take his visitors to look at them, after they had gone the round of house and gardens.'

'I hope you are proud of him,' said Daphne, with a bright penetrating glance which seemed to pierce Mr. Goring's soul. 'I should hate you if I thought that, even for one moment in your life, you could feel ashamed of such a father.'

'Then I'm afraid I must endure your hate,' said Gerald. 'No; I have never felt ashamed of my father: he was the dearest, kindest, most unselfish, most indulgent father that ever spoiled an unworthy son. But I have occasionally felt ashamed of that barrow, when it has been exhibited and explained to a new acquaintance, and I have seen that the new acquaintance thought the whole thing—the mock mediæval abbey, and the barrow, and my dear simple-hearted dad—one stupendous joke.'

'I should be more ashamed of Felicia, Countess of Heronville, than of that barrow, if I were you,' exclaimed Daphne, flushed and indignant.

'You little radical! Mistress Felicia was by no means an exemplary person, but she was one of the loveliest women at Charles's court, where lovely women congregated by common consent, while all the ugly ones buried themselves at their husbands' country seats, and thought that some fiery comet must be swooping down upon the world because of wickedness in high places. Don't be too hard upon poor Lady Heronville. She died in the zenith of her charms, while quite a young woman.'

'Do you think she ought to be pitied for that?' demanded Daphne. 'Why, it was the brightest fate Heaven could give her. The just punishment for her evil ways would have been a long loveless old age, and to see her beauty fade day by day, and to know that the world she loved despised and forgot her.

> "Whom the gods love die young, was said of old;
> And many deaths do they escape by this."'

'Where did you find those lines, little one?'

'In a book we used to read aloud at Madame Tolmache's, "Gems from Byron."'

'Oh, I see! Mere chippings, diamond dust. I was afraid you'd been at the Koh-i-noor itself.'

'Are we to have some tea, Gerald?' asked Madoline, crossing to them and looking at her watch as she came. 'It is half-past four, and we must be going home soon.'

'To the cloisters, ladies and gentlemen, to all that there is of the most mediæval in the Abbey.'

They passed under a Gothic archway and found themselves on a square green lawn, in the midst of which was another fountain in a genuine old marble basin, a Roman relic dug up thirty years ago in the peninsula of Portland. A cloistered walk surrounded this grass-plot. A striped awning had been put up beside the fountain, and under this the tea-table was spread.

'Now, Lina, let us see if you can manage that ponderous tea-kettle,' said Gerald.

'It is the handsomest I ever saw,' sleepily remarked Mrs. Ferrers, who had found the afternoon somewhat dreary, since nobody had seemed to want her advice about anything. 'But I must confess that I prefer the Rector's George the Second silver, and old Swansea cups and saucers, to the highest exemplars of modern art.'

CHAPTER XI.

'YEVE ME MY DETH, OR THAT I HAVE A SHAME.'

Sir Vernon Lawford was sitting alone in his study on the morning after the visit to Goring Abbey, when the door opened suddenly with a sharp jerk, and his younger daughter stood before him. The very manner in which the door opened told him, before he looked up from his desk, that the intruder was Daphne, and not the always welcome Madoline.

He looked at his daughter with cold severe eyes, as at a person who had no right to be there. Ever since she could remember, Daphne had feared her father much more than she loved him; but never had he seemed to her so awful a being as he appeared this morning in his own room, surrounded by all the symbols of power—the bronze bust of Cicero looking down at him from the bookcase; his despatch-box open at his side, bristling with pen-knives and paper-knives, and stern official stationery; his ponderous silver inkstand, presented by the Warwickshire yeomanry in acknowledgment of his merits as colonel; his russia-leather bound dictionaries and directories, and brazen letter-weighing machine—and all the pomp and circumstance of his business life about him.

'Well, Daphne, what do you want?' he asked, looking at her without a ray of sympathetic feeling in his handsome gray eyes.

'If you please, papa,' she faltered, blushing deeply under that severe gaze, and pleating up the edge of her lawn-tennis pinafore in supreme nervousness, 'I don't think I'm really finished.'

'Finished!' he exclaimed, looking at her as if he thought she was an idiot. 'Finished what? You never finish anything, or begin anything either, so far as I can hear, that is worth doing.'

'My education, I mean, papa,' she said, looking at him with eyes so lovely in hue and expression, so piteous in their timid pleading, that they ought to have touched him. 'I know you sent me to Madame Tolmache to be finished, and that she was very expensive; but I'm afraid I came away horribly ignorant; and I begin to feel that a year or two more of schooling would be of very great value to me. I am older now, don't you know, papa; and I should try more earnestly to improve myself. Indeed, indeed, papa, I would work very hard this time,' urged Daphne, remorsefully remembering how little she had worked in the past. 'I don't care where you send me: to Asnières, or to Germany, or anywhere: so that I could only go on with my education.'

'Go on with it at home,' answered Sir Vernon contemptu-

ously. 'You can read, and write, and spell, I suppose. Yes; I have some of your letters asking me for different things in those pigeon-holes. Any woman who can do as much as that can improve herself. There are books enough on those shelves'—with a glance at his classical and correct collection—'to make you wiser than any woman need be. But as for this freak of wanting to go back to school——'

'It is no freak, papa. It is my most earnest desire. I feel it would be better—for all of us.'

She had changed from red to white by this time, and stood before her father like a culprit, downcast and deadly pale.

'It would not be better for me who would have to pay the bills. I have paid a pretty penny already for your education; and you may suppose how vastly agreeable it is to me to hear your frank confession of ignorance.'

'It is best for me to tell the truth, papa. Do not deny me this favour. It is the first great thing I have ever asked of you.'

'It is a very foolish thing, and I should be a fool if I humoured your caprice.'

She gave a little cry of mental pain.

'How can I convince you that it is no caprice?' she asked despairingly. 'I was lying awake all last night thinking about it. I am most thoroughly in earnest, papa.'

'You were thoroughly in earnest about your boat; and now you are tired of it. You were intensely anxious to come home; and now you are tired of home. You are a creature of whims and fancies.'

'No, I am not tired of my boat,' she cried passionately. 'I love it with all my heart, and the dear river, and this place, and Madoline—and you—if you would only let me love you. Father,' she said in a low tremulous voice, coming hurriedly to her father and kneeling at his feet, with clasped hands uplifted beseechingly, 'there are times in a woman's life when a light shines suddenly upon her, showing her where her duty lies. I believe that it is my duty to go back to school, somewhere in France, or Germany, where I can get on with my education and grow serious and useful, as a woman ought to be. It will be very hard, it will be parting from all I love best in the world, but I feel and know that it is my duty. Let me go, dear father. The outlay of a few pounds cannot affect you.'

'Can it not? That shows how little you know of the world. When a man is overweighted as I am in this place, living up to every sixpence of his income, and so fettered that he cannot realise an acre of his estate, every hundred he has to spend is of moment. Your education has been a costly business already; and I distinctly refuse to spend another sixpence on it. If you have not profited by my outlay, so much the worse for you.

Get up, child.' She was still on her knees, looking at him in blank despair. 'This melo-dramatic fooling is the very last thing to succeed with a man of my stamp. I detest heroics.'

'Very well, father,' she answered in a subdued tone, strangling her sobs and standing straight and tall before him. 'I hope if you should ever have cause to blame me for anything in the future you will remember this refusal to-day.'

'I shall blame you if you deserve blame, you may be sure of that,' he answered harshly.

'And never praise me when I deserve praise, and never love me, or sympathise with me, or be a father to me—except in name.'

'Precisely,' he said, looking downward with a gloomy brow. 'Except in name. And now be kind enough to leave me. I have a good many letters to write.'

Daphne obeyed without a word. When she was in the corridor outside, and had shut the door behind her, she stopped for a few moments leaning against the wall, looking straight before her with a countenance of inexpressible sadness.

'It was the only thing I could do,' she murmured with a heavy sigh.

Sir Vernon told his elder daughter that afternoon of Daphne's absurd fancy about going back to school.

'Did you ever hear of such a mass of inconsistency?' he exclaimed angrily. 'After worrying you continually with appealing letters to be brought home, she is tired of us all and wants to be off again in less than six months.'

'It is strange, papa, especially in one who is so thoroughly sweet and loving,' said Madoline thoughtfully. 'Do you know I'm afraid it must be my fault.'

'In what way?'

'I have been urging her to continue her education; and perhaps I may have inadvertently given her the idea that she ought to go back to school.'

'That is simply to suppose her an idiot, and unable to comprehend plain English,' retorted Sir Vernon testily. 'You are always making excuses for her. Hark!' he cried, as a bright girlish laugh came ringing across the summer air. 'There she is, playing tennis with Turchill. Would you suppose that two hours ago she was kneeling to me like a tragedy queen, her eyes streaming with tears, entreating to be sent back to school?'

'I'll reason her out of her fancy, dear father. She always gives way to me when I wish it.'

'I am glad she has just sense enough to understand your superiority.'

'Dearest father, if you would be a little more affectionate to her—in your manner, I mean—I believe she would be a great deal happier.'

Another ringing laugh from Daphne.

'She is monstrously unhappy, is she not?' exclaimed Sir Vernon. 'My dear Lina, that girl is a born *comédienne*. She will always be acting tragedy or comedy all her life through. This morning it was tragedy; this afternoon it is comedy. Do not let yourself be duped by her.'

'Believe me, papa, you misjudge her.'

'I hope it may be so.'

'Daphne, what is this fancy of yours about going back to school?' asked Madoline, when she and her sister were sitting in the conservatory that evening in the sultry summer dusk, while Sir Vernon and the two young men were talking politics over their claret. 'I was quite grieved to hear of it, believing, as I did, that you were very happy at home.'

'Why, so I am—intensely happy—with you, darling,' answered Daphne, taking her sister's hand, and twisting the old-fashioned brilliant hoops, which Lina had inherited from her grandmother, round and round upon the slender finger. 'So I am, dear, utterly happy. But happiness is not the be all and end-all of this life, is it, Lina? The Rector is continually telling us that it isn't, in those prosy port-winey old sermons of his; but if he were only candid about his feelings he would say that the end and aim of this life was dinner. I don't suppose I was born only to be happy, was I, Lina? We unfortunate mortals are supposed to belong to the silkworm rather than to the butterfly species, and to work out a career of usefulness in the grub and worm stages, before we earn the right to flutter feebly for a little while as elderly moths. Youth, from a Christian point of view, is meant for work and self-abnegation, and duty, and all that kind of thing; isn't it, Lina?'

'Every stage of life has its obligations, dearest; but your duties are very easy ones,' answered Madoline gently. 'You have only to be respectful and obedient to your father, and to do as much good as you can to those who need your kindness, and to be grateful to God for the many good gifts He has lavished upon you.'

'Yes; I suppose that upon the whole I am a very fortunate young person, although I am a pauper,' said Daphne sententiously. 'I have youth, and the use of all my faculties, and a ridiculously good constitution. I know I can walk knee-deep in wet grass and never catch cold, and drink quarts of iced water when I am in a fever of heat, and do all manner of things that people consider tantamount to suicide, and be none the worse for my folly. And then I have a fine house to live in; though I have the sense that I am nobody in it; and I have a very aristocratic father—to look at. Yes, Madoline, I have all these things, and they are of no account to me; but I

have your love, and that is worth them all a hundred times over.'

The sisters sat with clasped hands, Madoline touched by the wayward girl's affection. The moon was shining above the deodaras; the last of the nightingales was singing amidst the darkness of the shrubbery.

'Why do you want to go back to school, Daphne?' asked Lina again, coaxingly.

'I don't want to go.'

'But this morning you were begging papa to send you back.'

'Yes; I had an idea that I ought to improve myself—this morning. But as papa refused to grant my request in a very decisive manner, I have put the notion out of my head. I thought that another year with Madame Tolmache might have improved my French, and reconciled me to the necessity for a subjunctive mood, which I never could see while I was at Asnières; or that a twelvemonth in Germany might have enabled me to distinguish the verbs that require the dative case after them, from the verbs that are satisfied with the accusative, which at present is a thing utterly beyond me. But papa says no, and, as I am much fonder of boating and tennis and billiards than of study, I am not going to find fault with papa's decision.'

This was all said so lightly, with so much of the natural recklessness of a high-spirited girl who has never had a secret in her life, that Madoline had not a moment's doubt of her sister's candour. Yet there was a hardness in Daphne's tone to-night that grieved her.

'Who is fond of billiards?' asked Gerald's lazy tones, a little way above them, and, looking up, they saw him leaning with folded arms upon the broad marble balustrade. 'Are you coming up to the drawing-room to give us some music, or are we coming down to the billiard-room to play a match with you?' he inquired.

'Whichever my father likes,' answered Madoline.

'Sir Vernon will not play this evening. He has gone to his room to read the evening papers. I think he has not forgiven Turchill for the series of flukes by which he won that game last night. Edgar and I will have a clear stage and no favour this evening, and we mean to give you two young ladies a tremendous licking.'

'You will have an easy victim in me,' said Madoline. 'I have not played half-a-dozen times since you left home.'

'Devotion surpassing Penelope's. And Daphne, I suppose, is still a tyro at the game. We must give you seventy-five out of a hundred.'

'You are vastly condescending,' exclaimed Daphne, drawing

herself up. 'You will give me nothing! I don't care how ignominiously I am beaten; but I will not be treated like a baby.'

'*Und etwas schnippish doch zugleich*,' quoted Mr. Goring, smiling to himself in the darkness.

And now Edgar Turchill came out of the drawing-room, and the two young men went down the shallow flight of steps to the conservatory, where Madoline and her sister were still seated in their wicker-work chairs in front of the open door, through which the moonlit garden looked so fair a scene of silent peace.

'Daphne is quite right to reject your humiliating concessions,' said Edgar. 'She and I will play against you and Madoline, and beat you.'

'Easily done, my worthy Saxon,' answered Gerald, who was apt to make light of his friend's ancient lineage, in a good-natured easy-going way. 'I have never given more than a fraction of my mind to billiards.'

'Then you must be a deuced bad player,' said Edgar bluntly.

They all went down into the billiard-room, where Daphne's eyes sparkled with unaccustomed fire in the lamplight, as if the mere notion of the coming contest had fevered her excitable brain. Turchill, who was thoroughly earnest in his amusements, took off his coat with the air of a man who meant business. Gerald Goring slipped out of his as if he were going to lie down for an after-dinner nap on one of the broad morocco-covered divans.

And now began the fight. Gerald and Madoline were obviously nowhere, from the very beginning. Daphne had a firmness of wrist, a hawklike keenness of eye, an audacity of purpose that accomplished miracles. The more difficult the position the better her stroke. Her boldness conquered where a more cautious player must have failed. She sent her adversaries' ball rattling into the pockets with a dash that even stimulated Gerald Goring to applaud his antagonist. And while she swelled the score by the most startling strokes, Edgar crept quietly after her with his judicious and careful play—doing wonderful things with his arms behind his back, in the easiest manner.

'I throw up the sponge,' cried Gerald, after struggling feebly against his fate. 'Lina, dearest, forgive me for my candour, but you are playing almost as wretchedly as I. We are both out of it. You two young gladiators had better finish the game by playing against each other up to a hundred, while Lina and I look on and applaud you. I like to see youth energetic, even if its energies are misdirected.'

He seated himself languidly on the divan which commanded the best view of the table. Lina sat by his side, her white hands moving with an almost rhythmical regularity as she

knitted a soft woollen comforter for one of her numerous pensioners.

'My busy Penelope, don't you think you might rest from your labours now that Ulysses is safe at home, and the suitors are all put to flight?' asked Gerald, looking admiringly at the industrious hands. 'You have no idea how horribly idle you make me feel.'

'I think idleness is the privilege of your sex, Gerald; but it would be the penalty of ours. I am wretched without some kind of work.'

'Another case of misdirected energy,' sighed Gerald, throwing himself lazily back against the India-matting dado, and clasping his hands above his head, as he watched the antagonists.

Daphne was playing as if her life depended on her victory. Her slim figure was braced like a young athlete's, every muscle of the round white arm defined under her muslin sleeve—the bare supple wrist and delicate hand looking as strong as steel. She moved round the table with the swift lightness of some wild thing of the woods—graceful, shy, untamable, half-savage, yet wholly beautiful.

Edgar Turchill went on all the while in his business-like way, playing with either hand, and behaving just as coolly as if he had been playing against Sir Vernon. Yet every now and then, when it was Daphne's turn to play, he fell into a dreamy contemplative mood, and stood on one side watching her as if she were something too wonderful to be quite human.

'There's a stroke!' he cried, as she left him tight under the cushion, with nothing to play for. 'I taught her. Oughtn't I to be proud of such a pupil?'

'You taught me sculling, and lawn-tennis, and billiards,' said Daphne, considering what she should do next. 'All I have ever learnt worth knowing.'

'Daphne!' murmured Madoline, looking up reproachfully from her ivory needles.

'I say it advisedly,' argued Daphne, making another score. 'Edgar, I am not at all sure you are marking honestly. Mr. Goring would mark for us if he were not too lazy.'

'Not too lazy,' murmured Gerald languidly, 'but too delightfully occupied in watching you. I would not spoil my pleasure by mixing it with business for the world.'

'What is the use of book-learning?' continued Daphne, going on with her argument. 'I maintain that Edgar has taught me all I know worth knowing, for he has taught me how to be happy. I adore the river; I doat upon billiards; and next best after billiards I like lawn-tennis. Do you suppose I shall ever be happier for having learnt French grammar, or the Rule of Three!'

'Daphne, you are the most inconsistent person I ever met with,' said Madoline, almost angry. 'Only this morning you wanted to go back to school to finish your education.'

'Did she?' asked Gerald, suddenly attentive.

'That was all nonsense,' exclaimed Daphne, colouring violently.

Mr. Turchill laughed heartily at the idea.

'Go back to school!' he exclaimed. 'What, after having tasted liberty, and learnt to shoot Stratford bridge, and to beat her master at billiards—for that last cannon makes the hundred, Daphne! Back to school, indeed! What a little humbug you must be to talk of such a thing!'

'Yes,' answered Daphne coolly, as she put away her cue, and came quietly round to her sister's side; 'I am a little bit of a humbug. I think I try to humbug myself sometimes. I persuaded myself this morning that I really thirsted for knowledge; but my father contrived to quench that righteous thirst with a very big dose of cold water—so henceforth I renounce all attempts to improve myself.'

The clock on the chimney-piece struck the half-hour after ten.

'I ordered my dog cart for ten,' said Gerald; 'I hope we have not transgressed, Lina, by staying so late?'

'I am not going till eleven, unless Miss Lawford sends me away,' said Turchill. 'Eleven is the mystic hour at which Sir Vernon usually tells me to go about my business. I know the ways and manners of the house better than a wretched wanderer like you, whose last idea of time is derived from some wretched old Dalecarlian town-clock.'

'We had better go back to the drawing-room,' suggested Madoline. 'My father has finished his letters by this time, I daresay.'

'Then good-night everybody,' said Daphne. 'I'm going into the garden to cool myself after that fearful struggle, and then to bed.'

She ran off through the conservatory while Gerald was opening the opposite door for Madoline to go up to the drawing-room by the indoor staircase.

Daphne stopped to draw breath on the moonlit terrace.

'How ridiculously I have been gabbling!' she said to herself, with her hands clasping her burning forehead. 'Why can't I hold my tongue? I am detestable to myself and everybody.'

'Daphne,' said someone close at her side, in a tone of friendliest concern, 'I'm afraid you're really tired.'

It was Edgar Turchill, who had followed her through the conservatory.

'Tired! Not at all. I would play against you again to-night—and beat you—if it were not too late.'

'But I am sure you are tired; there is a something in your voice—strained, unnatural. Have you been vexed to-day? My poor little Daphne,' he went on tenderly, taking her hand, 'something has gone wrong with you, I am sure. Has your aunt been lecturing?'

'No. My father was unkind to me this morning; and I was weak enough to take his unkindness to heart; which I ought not to have done, being so well broken in to it.'

'And did you really and truly wish to go back to school?'

'I really and truly felt that I was an ignoramus, and that I had better go on with my education while I was young enough to learn.'

'Daphne, if you had all the knowledge of all the girls in Girton screwed into that little golden head of yours, you wouldn't be one whit more charming than you are now.'

'I daresay the effect would be the other way; but I might be a great deal more useful. I might teach in a poor school, or nurse the sick, or do something in some way to help my fellow-creatures. But sculling, and billiard-playing, and lawn-tennis—isn't it a horridly empty life?'

'If there were not birds and butterflies, and many bright useless things, this world wouldn't be half so beautiful as it is, Daphne.'

'Oh, now you are dropping into poetry, like Mr. Wegg, and I must go to bed,' she retorted, with good-humoured petulance, cheered by his kindness. 'Good-night, Edgar. You are always good to me. I shall always like you,' she said gently.

'Always like me. Yes, I hope so, Daphne. And do you still think that you would rather have had me than Gerald Goring for your brother?'

'Ten thousand times.'

'Yet he is a thoroughly amiable fellow, kind to everyone, generous to a fault.'

'A man with a million of money can't be generous,' answered Daphne; 'he can never give anything that he wants for himself. Generosity means self-sacrifice, doesn't it? It was generous of you to leave Hawksyard at six in the morning in order to teach me to scull.'

'I would do a great deal more than that to please you, and count it no sacrifice,' said Edgar gravely.

'I am sure you would,' answered Daphne, with easy frankness.

She was so thoroughly convinced that he would never leave off caring for Madoline, and would go down to his grave fondly faithful to his first misplaced affection, that no word or tone or look of his, however significant, suggested to her any other feeling on his part than an honest brotherly regard for herself.

'Tell me what you think of Goring, now that you have had time to form an opinion about him.'

'I think that he is devoted to Lina, and that is all I want to know about him,' answered Daphne decisively.

'And do you think him worthy of her?'

'Oh, that is a wide question. There was never a man living except King Arthur that I should think absolutely worthy of my sister Madoline; but as he is lying in Glastonbury Abbey, I think Mr. Goring will do as well as anyone else. I hope Lina will govern him, for his own sake as well as hers.'

'You think him weak, then?'

'I think him self-indulgent; and a self-indulgent man is always a weak man, isn't he? Look at Gladstone now, a man of surpassing energy, of illimitable industry, a man who will eat a snack of cold beef and drink a glass of cold water for his luncheon, at his desk, in the midst of his work, anyhow. Mr. Lampton, the new member who went up to see him, gave us a sketch of him in his study, living so simply and working so hard, so thoroughly homely and unaffected.'

'Daphne, I thought you were a hardened little Tory!'

'So I am; but I can admire the individual though I may detest his politics. That is the kind of man I should like Lina to marry: a man without a selfish thought, a man made of iron.'

'Don't you think a wife might hurt herself now and then against the rough edges of the iron? Those unselfish men are apt to demand a good deal of self-sacrifice from others.'

'And you think Lina was made to sit in a drawing-room all her life, among hot-house flowers. Well, I believe she will be very happy at Goring Abbey. She likes a quiet domestic life, and to live among the people she loves. And Mr. Goring's selfishness will hardly trouble her. She has had such splendid training with papa.'

'Daphne, do you think it is quite right to speak of your father in that way?' asked Edgar reproachfully.

He was wounded by her flippant tone, hurt by every evidence of faultiness in one whom he hoped the future would develop into perfect woman and perfect wife.

'Would you like me to be a hypocrite?'

'No, Daphne. But if you can't speak of Sir Vernon as he ought to be spoken of, don't you think it would be better to say nothing at all?'

'For the future I shall be dumb, in deference to Mr. Turchill—and the proprieties. But it was nice to have one friend in the world with whom I could be thoroughly confidential,' she added coaxingly.

'Pray be confidential with me.'

'I can't, if you once begin to lecture. I have a horror of

people who talk to me for my own good. That is Aunt Rhoda's line. She is never tired of preaching to me for my good, and I never feel so utterly bad as I do after one of her preachments. And now I really must say good-night. Don't forget that you are engaged to dine at the Rectory to-morrow.'

'Are not you and Lina going?'

'Yes, and Mr. Goring. It is to be a regular family gathering. Papa is asked, but I cherish a faint hope that he may not feel in the humour for going. I beg your pardon,' exclaimed Daphne, making him a ceremonious curtsy. 'My honoured parent has been invited, and wherever he is his children must be happy. Is that the kind of thing you like?' she asked tripping away to the little half-glass door at the other end of the terrace.

Edgar ran after her to open the door for her; but she was fleet as Atalanta, and there was nobody to distract her with golden apples. She shut the door and drew the bolt, just as Edgar reached it, and nodded a smiling good-night to him through the glass. He stopped to see the white frock vanish from the lamp-lit lobby, and then turned away to light a cigarette and take a solitary turn on the terrace before going back to the drawing-room to make his adieux.

It was a spot where a man might love to linger on such a night as this. The winding river, showing in fitful glimpses between its shadowy willows; the distant woods; the dim lights of the little quiet town; the tall spire rising above the trees; made up a landscape dearer to Edgar Turchill's honest English heart than all the blue mountains and vine-clad valleys of the Sunny South. He was a son of the soil, with all his desires and prejudices and affections rooted in the land on which he had been born. 'How sweet—how completely lovable she is,' he said to himself, meditating over that final cigarette, 'and how thoroughly she trusts me! Her mind is as clear as a rivulet, through which one can count every pebble and every grain of golden sand.'

CHAPTER XII.

'AND TO THE DINNER FASTE THEY HEM SPEDDE.'

Mr. MacCloskie's suggestions for new hot-houses at Goring Abbey were on so large a scale as to necessitate a good deal of consultation with architect and builder before the new constructions and alterations of existing structures were put in hand. The head gardener at South Hill had tried his hardest to secure the whole organisation and direction of the work for himself, and to have large powers in the choice of the men who were to carry it out.

'Ye'll not need any architect, Mr. Goring, if ye'll joost let me explain my mind to the builder,' said this modest Caledonian. 'Architects know a deal about the Parthenon and the Temple of the Winds, and that kind of old-fashioned classical stuff, but there's not one of 'em knows how to plan a good workable hot-house, or to build a flue that won't smoke when the wind's contrairy. Architects are very good for the fronts of club-houses and ceevil-service stores, and that like; but if you trust your new houses to an architect, I'll give odds when they're done there'll be no place for me to put my coals. If you'll just give me free scope——'

'You are very good, Mr. MacCloskie,' answered Gerald with velvety softness, 'but my father was a thoroughly practical man, and I believe he knew as much of the science of construction as any man living; yet he always employed an architect when he wanted anything built for himself, were it only a dustbin. I'll stick to his lines.'

'Very well, sir, you must please yourself. But an orchid-house is a creetical thing to build. The outside of it may be as handsome as St. Peter's at Rome; but your orchids won't thrive unless they like the inside arrangements, and for them ye'll want a practical man.'

'I'll get a practical man, Mr. MacCloskie; you may be sure of that,' answered Gerald, ineffably calm, though the Scot was looking daggers.

The morning before Mrs. Ferrers's family dinner was devoted to the architect, who came down from London to Goring Abbey, expressly to advise and be instructed. He was entertained at luncheon at the Abbey; and Lina drove over under her aunt's wing to meet him, while Gerald's thoroughbred hack—a horse of such perfect manners that it mattered very little whether his rider had hands or no hands—ambled along the turfy borders of the pleasant country road beside the phaeton.

Daphne had her day all to herself, since, knowing her to be alone at South Hill, Edgar had no excuse for going there; and, as Mr. Turchill argued with himself, a man must give some portion of his life to the dearest old mother and the most picturesque old house in the county. So, Edgar, with his fancies flying off and circling about South Hill, contrived to spend a moony day at home, mending his fishing-rods, reviewing his guns, writing a few letters, and going in and out of his mother's homely old-fashioned morning-room twenty times between breakfast and luncheon.

Mrs. Turchill had been invited to the family dinner at Arden Rectory, and had accepted the invitation, though she was not given to dissipation of any kind, and she and her son found a good deal to say about the coming feast during Edgar's desultory droppings-in.

'I hope you'll like her, mother,' said Edgar, stopping, with a gun in one hand and an oily rag in the other, to look dreamily across the moat to the quiet meadows beyond, where the dark red Devon cows contrasted deliciously with the fresh green turf sprinkled with golden buttercups and silvery marguerites.

'Like her!' echoed Mrs. Turchill, lifting her soft blue eyes in mild astonishment from her matronly task of darning one of the best damask table-cloths. 'Why she is the sweetest girl I know. I would have given ten years of my life for you to have married her.'

This was awkward for Edgar, who had spoken of Daphne, while Mrs. Turchill thought of Madoline.

'Not with my consent, mother,' he said, laughing, and reddening as he laughed. 'I couldn't have spared a single year. But I wasn't speaking of Madoline just then. I know of old how fond you are of her. I was talking of poor little Daphne, whom you haven't seen since she came from her French school.'

'French school!' exclaimed Mrs. Turchill contemptuously. 'I hate the idea of those foreign schools, regular Jesuitical places, where they take girls to operas and theatres and give them fine notions,' pursued the Saxon matron, whose ideas on the subject were slightly mixed. 'Why couldn't Sir Vernon send her to the Misses Tompion, at Leamington? That's a respectable school if you like. Good evangelical principles, separate bed rooms, and plain English diet. I hope the French school hasn't spoilt Daphne. She was a pretty little girl with bright hair, I remember, but she had rather wild ways. Something too much of a tomboy for my taste.'

'She was so young, mother, when you saw her last, not fifteen.'

'Well, I suppose French governesses have tamed her down, and that she's pretty stiff and prim by this time,' said Mrs. Turchill with chilling indifference.

'No, mother, she is a kind of girl whom no training would ever make conventional. She is thoroughly natural, original even, and doesn't mind what she says.'

'That sounds as if she talked slang,' said Mrs. Turchill, who, although the kindest of women in her conduct could be severe of speech on occasion, 'and of all things I detest slang in a woman. I hope she is industrious. The idleness of the young women of the present day is a crying sin.'

Edgar Turchill seemed hardly to be aware of this last remark. He was polishing the gun-metal industriously with that horrible oily rag which accompanied him everywhere on his muddling mornings at home.

'She's accomplished, I suppose,' speculated Mrs. Turchill—'plays, and sings, and paints on velvet.'

'Ye—es; that's to say I'm not sure about the velvet,' an-

swered Edgar faintly, not remembering any special artistic performances of Daphne's except certain attempts on a drawing-block, which had seemed to him too green and too cloudy to lead to much, and which he had never beheld in an advanced stage. 'She is awfully fond of reading,' he added in rather a spasmodic manner, after an interval of silent thought. 'The poetry she knows would astonish you.'

'That would be easy,' retorted Mrs. Turchill. 'My father and mother didn't approve of poetry, and Cowper, Thomson, and Kirke White were the only poets allowed to be read by us girls at old Miss Tompion's—these ladies are nieces of my Miss Tompion, you know, Edgar.'

'How can I help knowing it, mother, when you've told me a hundred and fifty times?' exclaimed her son, more impatiently than his wont.

'Well, Edgar, my dear, if you're tired of my conversation—'

'No, you dear peppery old party, not a bit. Go on like an old dear as you are. Only I thought you were rather hard upon poor little Daphne just now.'

'How can I be hard upon her, when I haven't seen her for the last three years! Dear, dear, what a small place Leamington was in my time,' pursued Mrs. Turchill, musing blandly upon the days of her youth; 'but it was much more select. None of these rich people from Birmingham; none of these Londoners coming down to hunt; but a very superior class—invalids, elderly people who came to drink the waters, and to consult Doctor Jephson.'

'It must have been lively,' murmured Edgar, not deeply interested.

'It was not lively, Edgar, but it was select,' corrected Mrs. Turchill with dignity, as she paused with her head on one side to admire the neatness of her own work.

She was the kindest and best of mothers, but Edgar felt on this particular occasion that she was rather stupid, and a trifle narrow in her ideas. A purely rustic life has its disadvantages, and a life which is one long procession of placid prosperous days, knowing little more variety than the change of the seasons, is apt to blunt the edge of the keenest intellect. Mrs. Turchill ought to have been more interested in Daphne, Edgar thought.

'She will be delighted with her when she sees her,' he reasoned, comforting himself. 'Who can help being charmed with a girl who is so thoroughly charming?'

And then he took up his gun and his rag, and strolled away to another part of the roomy old house, so soberly and thoroughly old fashioned, not with the gimcrack spurious old fashion of to-day, but with the grave ponderous realities of centuries ago—walls four feet thick, deeply recessed windows, massive untrimmed joists, low ceilings, narrow passages, oak wainscoting,

inconveniences and shortcomings of all kinds, but the subtle charm of the remote past, the romantic feeling of a house that has many histories, pervading everything. Edgar would not have changed Hawksyard and his three thousand a-year for Goring Abbey and a million. The house and the land around it—or at any rate the land—had belonged to his race from time immemorial, far back in the dim days of the Heptarchy. Tradition held that the first of the Turchills had been a sokeman who possessed a yard of land on the old feudal tenure, one of his obligations being that he should breed hawks for the king's falconers, and thus the place had come in time to be called Hawksyard, long after the last hawk bred there had flown away to join some wild branch of the honey-buzzard family in the tree-tops of primeval Arden, and the yard of land had swelled into a very respectable manor. Edgar rather liked to believe that the founder of his race had been a sokeman, who had held thirty acres of land from the king at a penny an acre, and had furnished labourers for the royal harvest, and had ridden up and down the field with a wand in his hand to see that his men worked properly. This curious young man was as proud of Turchill the sokeman as of Turchill the high sheriff. If it was a humble origin its humility was of such ancient date that it became distinction. Turchill of the thirty acres was like Adam, or Paris, or David. In the long line of the Turchills whose bones were lying in the vaults below Hawksyard Church there had been men distinguished in the field, the Church, and the law; men who had fought on sea and land; men who had won power in the State, and used it well, true alike to king and commons. But the ruck of the Turchills had been country squires like Edgar, and Edgar's father; men who farmed their own land and lived upon it, and who had no ambitions and few interests or desires beyond their native soil.

Hawksyard was a real moated grange. The house formed three sides of a quadrangle, with a heavily buttressed garden wall for the fourth side. The water flowed all round the solid base of the building, a wide deep moat, well stocked with pike and eels, carp and roach. The square inner garden was a prim parterre of the seventeenth century, and there was not a flower grew there more modern than Lord Bacon's day. This was a Turchill fancy. All the novelties of nineteenth-century horticulture might flourish in the spacious garden on the other side of the moat; but this little bit of ground within the gray old walls was a sacred enclosure, dedicated to the spirit of the past. Here the old yew-trees were clipped into peacocks. Here grew rosemary; lavender; periwinkle, white, purple, and blue; germander; flags; sweet marjoram; primroses; anemones; hyacinths; and the rare fritillaria; double white violets, which bloom in April, and again at Bartholomew-tide; gilliflowers;

sweetbrier; and the musk-rose. Here the brazen sun-dial, on its crumbling stone pedestal, reminded the passer-by that no man is always wise. Here soft mosses, like tawny velvet, crept over the gray relics of an abbey that had been destroyed soon after the grange was built—the stone coffin of a mitred abbot; the crossed legs of a knightly crusader, with a headless heraldic dog at his feet. Here was the small circular fish-pond into which the last of the abbots was supposed to have pitched headforemost, and incontinently drowned himself, walking alone at midnight in a holy trance.

Mrs. Turchill was almost as fond as Edgar was of Hawksyard; but her affection took a commonplace turn. She was not to the manner born.

She had come to the grange from a smart nineteenth-century villa, and though she was very proud of the grave old house of which her husband had made her the mistress, her pride was mingled with an idea that Hawksyard was inconvenient, and that its old fashion was a thing to be apologised for and deprecated at every turn. Her chief delight was in keeping her house in order; and her servants were drilled to an almost impossible perfection in every duty appertaining to house-cleaning. Nobody's brasses, or oak floors, or furniture, or family plate, or pewter dinner-service, ever looked so bright as Mrs. Turchill's. Nowhere were windows so spotless; nowhere was linen so exquisitely white, or of such satin-like smoothness. Mrs. Turchill lived for these things. When she was in London, or at the sea-side, she would be miserable on rainy days at the idea that Jane or Mary would leave the windows open, and that the brass fenders and fire-irons were all going to ruin.

Edgar spent a moony purposeless day, dawdling a good deal in the garden on the other side of the moat, where the long old-fashioned borders were full of tall white lilies and red moss-roses, vivid scarlet geranium, heliotrope and calceolaria, a feast of sweet scents and bright colours. There was a long and wide lawn without a flower bed on it—a level expanse of grass; and on the side opposite the flower border there was a row of good old mulberry and walnut trees; then came a light iron fence, and a stretch of meadow land beyond it. The grounds at Hawksyard made no pretence of being a park. There was not even a shrubberry, only that straight row of old trees, standing up out of the grass, with a gravel walk between them and the fence, across which Edgar used to feed and fondle his cows, or coax the shy brood mares and their foals to social intercourse.

He looked round his domain doubtfully to day, wondering if it were good enough for Daphne, this poor table-land of a garden, a flat lawn, a long old-fashioned border crammed with homely flowers, the yew-tree arbour at the end of yonder walk. How poor a thing it seemed after South Hill, with its picturesque

timber and extensive view, its broad terrace and sloping lawn, its rich variety of shrubs and conifers!

'It isn't because I am fond of the place that she would care for it,' he told himself despondently. 'I'm afraid there's nothing romantic or striking about it—except the moat. I'm glad she's so fond of water.'

Edgar smoked a cigarette or two under the mulberry-trees, looked at his cows, talked to some of his men, and thus contrived to wear away the afternoon till the clock over the gateway struck five.

'Mother's tea-time. I'll go and have a cup with her,' he said to himself.

Going out to dinner was a tremendous piece of business with Mrs. Turchill. She was more serious and solemn about it than a strictly modern lady would feel about going to be married. Even in an instance of this kind, where the dinner was supposed to be entirely unceremonious, a friendly little gathering arranged on the spur of the moment, she was still full of fuss and preparation. She had spent an hour in her bed-chamber before luncheon, arranging and discussing with her maid Deborah what gown she would or would not wear on the occasion; and this discussion involved a taking out and unfolding of all her dinner-gowns, and an offering of divers laces upon divers bodices, to see which went best with which. A review of this kind generally ended by a decision in favour of black velvet, or satin, or silk, or brocade, as the case might be; Mrs. Turchill being much richer in gowns than in opportunities for wearing them.

'I always like myself best in black,' she would say, with a glance at the reflection of her somewhat florid complexion in the Chippendale glass.

'You always look the lady in your velvet, mum,' Deborah would answer sententiously.

Then after a day of quiet usefulness about her house the worthy matron would collect her energies over a leisurely cup of tea, and perhaps allow herself the refreshment of a nap after her tea, before she began the solemn business of the toilet.

The carriage had been ordered for a quarter past seven, though it was but half an hour's drive to Arden Rectory, and at seven o'clock Mrs. Turchill was seated in the white parlour, in all the dignity of her velvet gown and point-lace cap, her hereditary amethysts, supposed to be second only to those once possessed by George the Third's virtuous consort, and her scarlet and gold Indian shawl. She was a comely matron, with a complexion that had never been damaged by care or care, gas or late hours: a rosy-faced country-bred dame, with bright blue eyes, white teeth, and plentiful brown hair, in which the silver threads were hardly visible.

Edgar was standing by the open window, just where he had

stood in the morning with his gun, sorely perplexed as to the disposal of those fifteen minutes which had to be got through before the most punctual of coachmen would bring the carriage to the door. The London papers were lying unheeded on the table ; but Edgar had felt very little interest of late in the welfare of nations, or even in the last dreadful murder in Whitechapel.

'I hope my cap is right,' said Mrs. Turchill anxiously.

'How could it be wrong, mother, when you've Deborah and your looking-glass, and have never been known to dress yourself in a hurry?'

'I dislike doing anything in a hurry, Edgar. It is against my principles. But I never feel sure about the set of my cap. I am afraid Deborah's eye is not quite correct, and a glass is dreadfully deceiving. I wish you'd look, Edgar, if it isn't too much trouble.'

This was said reproachfully, as her son was kneeling on the window-seat staring idly down into the moat, as if he wanted to discover the whereabouts of an ancient pike that had evaded him last year.

'My dear mother,' he exclaimed, turning himself about to survey her, 'to my eye—which may be no better than Deborah's—that lace arrangement which you call a cap appears mathematically exact, as precise as your own straight, honest mind. There's Dobson with the carriage. Come along, mother.'

He led her out, established her comfortably in her own particular seat in the large landau, and seated himself opposite to her with a beaming countenance.

'How happy you look, Edgar!' said Mrs. Turchill, wondering at this unusual radiance. 'One would think it were a novelty for you to dine out. Yet I am sure,' somewhat plaintively, 'you don't very often dine at home.'

'The Rectory dinners are not to be despised, mother.'

'Mrs. Ferrers is an excellent manager, and does everything very nicely ; but as you don't much care what you eat that would hardly make you so elated. I am rather surprised that you care about meeting Madoline and Mr. Goring so often,' added Mrs. Turchill, who had not quite forgiven Lina for having refused to marry her son.

That is the worst of making a confidante of a mother. She has an inconveniently long memory.

'I have nothing but kindly feelings for either of them,' answered Edgar. 'Don't you know the old song, mother—"Shall I, wasting in despair, die because a woman's fair?" I don't look much like wasting in despair, do I, old lady?'

'I should be very sorry to see you unhappy, Edgar ; but I shall never love any wife of yours as well as I could have loved Madoline.'

'Don't say that, mother. That's too hard on the future Mrs. Turchill.'

This was a curious speech from a youth who six months ago had protested that he should never marry. But perhaps this was only Edgar's fun. Mrs. Turchill shared the common delusion of mothers, and thought her son a particularly humorous young man.

What a sweetly Arcadian retreat Arden Rectory looked on this fair summer evening, and how savoury was the odour of a *sole au gratin* which blended with the flowery perfumes of the low-panelled hall! The guests had wandered out through the window of the small drawing-room to the verandah and lawn in front of it. That long French window was a blot upon the architectural beauty of the half-timbered Tudor cottage, but it was very useful for circulation between drawing-room and garden.

Mrs. Ferrers and Madoline were sitting under the verandah; Daphne was standing a little way off on the lawn talking to the Rector and Gerald Goring. She was speaking with intense animation, her face full of brightness. Edgar darted off to join the group, directly he had shaken hands with the two ladies, leaving his mother to subside into one of those new-fangled bamboo chairs which she felt assured would leave its basket-work impression on her velvet gown.

'Edgar,' cried Daphne as he came towards her, 'did you ever hear of such a heathen—a man born on the soil—a very pagan?'

'Who is the culprit?' asked Edgar; 'and what has he done?'

'Mr. Goring has never seen Ann Hathaway's cottage.'

'I don't believe he knew who Ann Hathaway was till we told him,' said the Rector, with his fat laugh.

'And he has ridden and driven through Shottery hundreds of times, and he never stopped to look at the cottage where Shakespeare—the most wonderful man in the whole world—wooed and won his wife.'

'I have heard it dimly suggested that she wooed and won him,' remarked Gerald placidly; 'she was old enough.'

'You are too horrid,' cried Daphne. 'Would you be surprised to hear that Americans cross the Atlantic—three thousand miles of winds and waves and sea-sickness—on purpose to see Stratford-on-Avon, and Shottery, and Wilmcote, and Snitterfield?'

'I could believe anything of a Yankee,' answered Gerald, unmoved by these reproaches. 'But why Wilmcote? why Snitterfield? They are as poky little settlements as you could find in any agricultural district.'

'Did you ever hear of such hideous ignorance?' cried Daphne, and in a son of the soil. You are most unworthy of the honour of having been raised in Shakespeare's country. Why John

Shakespeare was born at Snitterfield, and Mary Arden lived with her father at Wilmcote ; and it was there he courted her.'

'John—Mary—oh, distant relations of the poet's, I suppose?' inquired Gerald easily.

'This is revolting,' exclaimed Daphne ; 'but he is shamming—he must be shamming.'

'Punish him for his ignorance, whether it is real or pretended,' cried Edgar. 'Make him row us all down to Stratford to-morrow morning ; and then we'll walk him over to Shottery, and make him give a new gown to the nice old woman who keeps the cottage.'

'A new gown,' echoed Daphne contemptuously ; 'he ought to be made to give her a cow—a beautiful mouse-coloured Channel Island cow.'

'I'll give her anything you like, as long as you don't bore me to death about Shakespeare. I hate sights and lions of all kinds. I went through Frankfort without looking at the house where Goethe was born.'

'A depraved desire to be singular,' said the Rector. 'I think he ought to forfeit a cow to Mrs. Baker. Rhoda, my love,' glancing furtively at his watch, 'our friends are all here. Todd is usually more punctual.'

Mrs. Ferrers, Lina, and Mrs. Turchill had strolled out to join the others. The prim rustic matron was looking at Daphne with astonishment rather than admiration. She was pretty, no doubt. Mrs. Turchill had never seen a more transparent complexion, or lovelier eyes ; but there was a reckless vivacity about the girl's manner which horrified the thoroughly British matron.

'Daphne,' said Edgar, 'I hope you haven't forgotten my mother. Mother, this is Daphne.'

Mrs. Turchill drew back a pace or two with extreme deliberation, and sank gracefully in the curtsy which she had been taught by the Leamington dancing-master—an undoubted Parisian—five-and-thirty years ago. After the curtsy she extended her hand and allowed Daphne to shake it.

'Come, Mrs. Turchill,' said the Rector, offering his arm. 'Goring, bring Miss Lawford ; Turchill will take care of my wife ; and Daphne'—he paused, smiling at the fair young face and slender girlish figure in soft white muslin—'Daphne shall have my other arm, and sit on my left hand. I feel there is a bond of friendship between us now that I find she is so fond of Shakespeare.'

'I'm afraid I know Hamlet's soliloquies better than I do my duty to my neighbour,' said Daphne, on the way to the dining-room, remembering how the Rector used to glower at her under his heavy brows when she broke down in that portion of the Church Catechism.

Mrs. Ferrers, from her opposite seat at the oval table, had a full view of her husband's demeanour, across the roses and maiden-hair ferns and old Derby crimson and purple dessert dishes. It was rather trying to her to see that he devoted himself entirely to Daphne during the pauses of the meal; and that, while he as in duty bound provided for all Mrs. Turchill's corporeal needs, and was solicitous that she should do ample justice to his wines and his dishes, he allowed her mind to starve upon the merest scraps of speech dropped into her ear at long intervals.

Nor was Edgar much better behaved to Mrs. Ferrers, for he sank into such a slough of despond at finding himself separated from Daphne, that his conversational sources ran suddenly dry, and Rhoda's lively inquiries about the plays and pictures he had just been seeing elicited only the humiliating fact that she, who had not seen them, knew a great deal more about them than he who had.

'What did you think of the Millais landscape?' she asked.

'Was there a landscape by Millais? I thought he was a portrait painter.'

This looked hopeless, but she tried again.

'And Frith's picture; you saw that of course.'

'No, I didn't,' he replied, brightening; 'but I saw the people looking at it. It was immensely good, I believe. There was a railing, and a policeman to make the people move on. My mother was delighted. She and another lady trod on each other's gowns in their eagerness to get at the picture. I believe they would have come to blows, if it hadn't been for the policeman.'

'And there was Miss Thompson's picture.'

'Yes; and another crowd. That is the sort of picture mother enjoys. I think the harder the struggle is the better she likes the picture.'

Gerald and Madoline were sitting side by side, talking as happily as if they had been in Eden. All the world might have heard their conversation—there were no secrets, there was no exchange of confidences—and yet they were as far away from the world about them, and as completely out of it, as if they had been in the planet Venus, rising so calmly yonder above the willows, and sending one tremulous arrow of light deep down into the dark brown river. For these two Mrs. Todd's most careful achievements were as nothing. Her *sole au gratin* might have been served with horse-radish sauce—or fried onions; her *vol-au-vent* might have been as heavy as suet pudding; her *blanquette* might have been bill-sticker's paste; her *soufflé* might have been flavoured with peppermint instead of *ramdle*; and they would hardly have discovered that anything was wrong.

And what delight it was by-and-by to wander out into the

cool garden, leaving the Rector to prose to poor Edgar over his Chambertin, and to lose themselves in the shadowy shrubbery, where the perfume of golden broom and mock orange seemed intensified by the darkness. Daphne sat in the quaint old candle-lit drawing-room conversing with the two matrons —Aunt Rhoda inclined to lecture; Mrs. Turchill inclined to sleepiness, having eaten a more elaborate dinner than she was used to, and feeling an uncomfortable tightness in the region of her velvet waistband.

Edgar got away from the Rector as soon as he decently could, and came to the relief of the damsel.

'Well, mother, how are you and Daphne getting on?' he asked cheerily. 'I hope you have made her promise to come to see you at Hawksyard.'

Mrs. Turchill started from semi-somnolence, and her waistband gave a little creak.

'I shall be delighted if Madoline will bring her sister to call on me some day,' she replied stiffly, addressing herself to nobody in particular.

'Call on you—some day! What an invitation!' cried Edgar. 'Why, mother, what has become of your old-fashioned hospitality? I want Daphne to come and stay with you, and to run about the house with you, and help you in your dairy and poultry-yard—and—get used to the place.'

Get used to the place! Why should Daphne get used to the place? For what reason was a fair-haired chit in a white frock suddenly projected upon Mrs. Turchill's cows and poultry—cows as sacred in her mind as if she had been a Hindoo; poultry which she only allowed the most trusted of her dependents to attend upon? She felt a sudden sinking of the heart, which was much worse than after-dinner tightness. Could it be that Edgar, her cherished Edgar, was going to throw himself away upon such a frivolous chit as this; a mere school-girl, without the slightest pretension to deportment?

Daphne all this time sat in a low basket-chair by the open window, and looked up at Edgar with calm friendly eyes—eyes which were at least without guile when they looked at him.

CHAPTER XIII.

'AFTER MY MIGHT FUL FAYNE WOLD I YOU PLESE.'

THE day after the family dinner was hopelessly wet; so the expedition to Shottery, proposed by Edgar Turchill and seconded by Daphne, was indefinitely postponed. The summer fleeted by, the beautiful bounteous summer, with her lap full of sweet-scented flowers; the corn grew tall, the hay was being carted in

many a meadow within sound of Stratford bells; and the woods began to put on that look of dull uniform green which indicates the beginning of the end. For the sisters at South Hill, for Gerald Goring and Edgar Turchill, July and August had been one long holiday. There was so little in life for these young people to do except take their pleasure. Theirs was an existence of perpetual rose-gathering: and the roses of life budded and bloomed for them with an inexhaustible fertility. Perhaps Madoline was the only one among them who had any idea of duty. Edgar was an affectionate son, a good master, and a liberal landlord, but he had never been called upon to sacrifice his own inclinations for the welfare of others, and he had never given his mind to any of the graver questions of the day. To him it mattered very little how the labouring classes as a body were taught and housed, so long as the peasants on his own land had decent cottages, and were strangers to want. It irked him not whether the mass of mankind were Jews or Gentiles, Ritualists, Dissenters, or rank unbelievers, so long as he sat in the old cloth-lined family pew on Sunday morning assisting at the same service which had been all-sufficient for his father, and seeing his dependents deporting themselves discreetly in their places in the gallery. His life was a narrow life, travelling in a narrow path that had been worn for him by the footsteps of his ancestors. He was a good man in a limited way. But he had never read the modern gospel, according to Thomas Carlyle, which after all is but an expansion of the Parable of the Talents: and he knew not that every man must work after some fashion or other, and do something for the time in which he lives. He was so thoroughly honest and true-hearted, that if the narrowness and uselessness of his life had been revealed to him, he would assuredly have girded his loins and taken up the pilgrim's staff. Never having had any such revelation he took his pleasure as innocently as a school-boy at home for the holidays, and had no idea that he was open to the same reproach which that man received who had buried the wealth entrusted to him.

He was as near happiness in this bright summer-tide as a mortal can hope to be. The greater part of his days were spent with Daphne, and Daphne was always delighted. True that she was changeable as the light July winds, and that there were times when she most unmercifully snubbed him. But to be snubbed by her was better than the smiles and blandishments of other women. She was given to that coyness and skittishness, the *grata protervitas*, which seems to have been the chief fascination of the professional beauty of the Augustan era. She was as coy as Chloe; coquettish as Glycera; fickle as Lydia, who, supposing there was only one lady of that name, and she a real personage, was rather too bad. Daphne was half-a-dozen girls in one; sometimes welcoming her swain so sweetly that

he felt sure she loved him, and the next day turning from him with scornful impatience, as if his very presence were weariness to her.

He bore it all. 'Being her slave what could he do,' etc. He had Shakespeare's sonnets by heart, and was somewhat of the slavish lover therein depictured. His Lydia might flout him to-day, and he was just as ready to fetch and carry for her on the morrow. She had changed, and for the worse, since the sweet fresh early summer-tide when they two had breakfasted *tête-à-tête* in the boat-house. She was not so even-tempered. She was ever so much more capricious and exacting; and she was prone to gloomy intervals which anyone other than a lover might have ascribed to sulks. Edgar wondered, not without sorrow, at the change; but it was not in him to blame her. He made all manner of excuses. Bad health was, perhaps, at the root of these discords. She might be a victim to obscure neuralgic pains and aches, which she heroically concealed from her friends—albeit her fair and fresh appearance belied the supposition. Perhaps it was the weather which made her occasionally cross. Who could go on in simpering placidity with the thermometer at ninety in the shade?

'And then we spoil her,' argued Edgar, urging his final plea. 'She is so bewitching that one can't help spoiling her. Madoline spoils her. I am an idiot about her; and even Goring, for all his contemptuous airs and graces, is almost as easily fooled by her as the rest of us. If we were more rational in our treatment of her, she would be less faulty. But then her very faults are charming.'

It had been, or had seemed to be, an utterly happy summer for everybody at South Hill. Two months of splendid weather; two months wasted in picnicking, and excursionising, driving, boating, lawn-tennis, tea-drinking, journeying to and fro between South Hill and Goring Abbey to watch the progress of the hot-houses, which, despite the unlimited means of their proprietor, progressed with a provoking slowness.

For some little time after Gerald's arrival Daphne had held herself as much as possible in the background. She had tried to keep aloof from the life of the two lovers; but this Madoline would not suffer.

'You are to be in all our amusements, and to hear all our plans, dear,' she told her sister one day. 'I never meant that you and I should be less together, or less dear to each other, because of Gerald's return. Do you think my heart is not big enough to hold you both?'

'I know it is, Lina. But I fancy Mr. Goring would like to have it all to himself, and would soon get to look upon me as an intruder, if I were too much with you. You had better leave me at home to amuse myself on the river, or to play ball

with Goldie, who is more than a person as to sense and sensibility.'

To this Madoline would not consent. Her love of her sister was so tempered with pity, so chastened and softened by her knowledge of the shadow that darkened the beginning of Daphne's life, that it was much deeper and stronger than the affection common among sisters. She wanted to make up to Daphne for all she had lost; for the cruel mother who had deserted her in her cradle; for the father's unjust resentment. And then there was the delightful idea that Edgar Turchill, that second best of men, whom she had rejected as a husband, would by-and-by be her brother; and that Daphne's future, sheltered and cherished by a good man's devoted love, would be as complete and perfect a life as the fairest and sweetest of women need desire to live. Madoline had quite made up her mind that Edgar was to marry Daphne. That he was passionately in love with her was obvious to the meanest capacity. Everybody at South Hill knew it except perhaps Daphne herself. That she liked him with placid sisterly regard was equally clear. And who could doubt that time would ripen this sisterly regard into that warmer feeling which could alone recompense him for his devotion? Thus, against the girl's own better sense, it became an understood fact that Daphne was to be a third in all the lovers' amusements and occupations, and that Mr. Turchill was very frequently to make a fourth in the same. To Gerald Goring the presence of these two seemed in no wise obnoxious. Daphne's vivacity amused him, and he looked upon his old friend Turchill as a considerably inferior order of being, not altogether unamusing after his kind. He was not an exacting lover. He accepted his bliss as a settled thing; he knew that no rock on Cornwall's rugged coast was more securely based than his hold on Madoline's affection. He was troubled by no jealous doubts; his love knew no hot fits or cold fits, no quarrelling for the after bliss of reconciliation. There was nothing of the *grata protervitas* in Madoline's gentle nature. Her well-balanced mind could not have stooped to coquetry.

August was drawing to its close. It had been a month of glorious weather, such halcyon days as made the farmer's occupation seem just the most delightful calling possible for man. There was not much arable land within ken of South Hill, but what cornfields there were promised abundant crops; and one of the magnates of the land—who, in his dudgeon against a revolutionary re-adjustment of the game-laws at that time looming in the dim future, had rough-ploughed a thousand acres or so of his best land rather than let it under obnoxious conditions—may have thought regretfully of the corn that might have been reaped off those breezy uplands and in those

fertile valleys, where at his bidding sprang cockle instead of barley. It was a month of holiday-making for everybody—for even the labour of the fields, looked at from the outside, seemed like holiday-making. Quiet little Stratford, flushed with spasmodic life by the arrival of a corps of artillery, tootled on trumpets, and daddy-mammyed on drums; while the horn of the Leamington coach blew lustily every morning and afternoon, and the foxhound puppy at nurse at The Red Horse found the middle of the highway no longer a comfortable place for his after-dinner nap. It was the season of American tourists, doing Stratford and its environs, guide-book in hand, and crowding in to The Red Horse parlour, after luncheon, to see the veritable chair in which Washington Irving used to sit.

There came a drowsy sunny noontide when the lovers had no particular employment for their day. They had been reduced to playing billiards directly after breakfast, until Gerald discovered that it was too warm for billiards, whereupon the four players—Lina, Daphne, Gerald, and Turchill—repaired to the garden in search of shade.

'Shade!' cried Daphne indignantly. 'Who wants shade? Who could ever have too much of Phœbus Apollo? Not I. We see too little of his godlike countenance, and I will never turn my back upon him.'

She seated herself on the burnt grass in the full blaze of the sun, while the other three sat in the shadow of an immense Spanish chestnut, which grew wide and low, making a leafy tent.

'This is a horrid idle way of spending one's day,' said Daphne, jumping up with sudden impatience, after they had all sat for half an hour talking lazily of the weather and their neighbours. 'Is there nothing for us to do?'

'Yes, you excitable young person,' answered Gerald; 'since your restless temper won't let us be comfortable here, we'll make you exert yourself elsewhere. The river is the only place where life can be tolerable upon such a day as this. The nicest thing would be to be in it: the next best thing perhaps is to be on it. You shall row us to Stratford Weir, Miss Daphne.'

'I should like it of all things. I am dying for something to do,' responded Daphne, brightening. 'You'll take an oar, won't you, Edgar?'

'Of course, if you'd really like to go. By-the-bye, suppose we improve the occasion by landing at Stratford, and walking Gerald over to Shottery to see Ann Hathaway's cottage.'

'Delicious,' cried Daphne. 'It shall be a regular Shakespearian pilgrimage. We'll take tea and things, and have kettle-drum in Mrs. Baker's house-place. She'll let me do what I like, I know. And Mr. Goring shall carry the basket, as a punishment for his hideous apathy. And we'll talk to him about Shakespeare's early life all the way.'

'Shakespeare's life, forsooth!' cried Gerald scornfully. 'Who is there that knows anything about it? Half-a-dozen entries in a parish register; a few traditional sayings of Ben Jonson's; and a pack of sentimentalists—English and German—evolve out of their inner consciousness a sentimental biography. "We may picture him as a youth going across the fields to Shottery: because it is the shortest way, and a man of his Titanic mind would naturally have taken it: yes, over the same meadows we tread this day: on the same ground, if not actually on the same grass." Or again: "Seeing that Apostle-spoons were still in common use in the reign of Elizabeth, it may be fairly concluded that the immortal poet used one for his bread and treacle: for who shall affirm that he did not eat bread and treacle, that the inspired lad of the Stratford grammar-school had not the same weaknesses and boyish affections as his schoolmates? Who would not love to possess Shakespeare's spoon, or to eat out of Shakespeare's porringer?" That is the kind of rot which clever men write about Shakespeare; and I think it is because I have been overdosed with such stuff that I have learned to detest the bard in his private character.'

'You are a hardened infidel, and you shall certainly carry the basket.'

'What, madam, would you degrade me to a hireling's office? "Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals."'

'There, you see,' cried Daphne triumphantly, 'you can't live without quoting him. He has interwoven himself with our daily speech.'

'Because we are parrots, without ideas of our own,' answered Gerald.

'Oh, I am proud of belonging to the soil on which he was reared. I wish there was one drop of his blood in my veins. I envy Edgar because his remote ancestry claim kin with the Ardens. I almost wish I were a Turchill.'

'That would be so easy to accomplish,' said Edgar softly, blushing at his own audacity.

Daphne noticed neither his speech nor his confusion. She was all excitement at the idea of an adventurous afternoon, were it only a visit to the familiar cottage.

'Madoline, dearest, may I order them to pack us a really nice tea?' she asked.

'Yes, dear, if we are all decided upon going.'

'It seems to me that the whole thing has been decided for us,' said Gerald, smiling indulgently at the vivacious face, radiant in the broad noonday light, the willowy figure in a white gown flecked and chequered with sunshine.

'You order me to row you down the Avon,' said Daphne, 'and I condemn you to a penitential walk to Shottery. You

ought by rights to go barefoot, dressed in a white sheet; only I don't think it would become you.'

'It might be too suggestive of the Turkish bath,' said Gerald. 'Well, I submit, and if needs be I'll carry the basket, provided you don't plague me too much about your poet.'

'I move an amendment,' interposed Edgar. 'Sir Vernon is to take the chair at Warwick at the Yeomanry dinner, so Miss Lawford is off duty. Let us all go on to Hawksyard and dine with the old mother. It'll delight her, and it won't be half bad fun for us. There'll be the harvest moon to light you home, Madoline, and the drive will be delicious in the cool of the——'

'Cockchafers,' cried Gerald. 'They are particularly cool at that hour—come banging against one's nose with ineffable assurance.'

'Say you'll come, Lina,' pleaded Edgar, 'and I'll send one of Sir Vernon's stable-boys to Hawksyard on my horse with a line to the mater, if I may.'

'I should enjoy it immensely—if Gerald likes, and if you are sure Mrs. Turchill would like to have us.'

'I think I'd better be out of it. I'm not a favourite with Mrs. Turchill,' said Daphne bluntly.

'Oh, Daphne!' cried Turchill ruefully.

'Oh, Edgar!' cried Daphne, mocking him. 'Can you lay your hand upon your heart, and declare, as an honest man, that your mother likes me?'

'Perhaps not quite so much as she will when she knows more of you,' answers the Squire of Hawksyard, as red as a turkey-cock. 'The fact is, she so worships Madoline that you are a little thrown into the shade.'

'Of course. How could anyone who likes Madoline care about me? It isn't possible,' retorted Daphne, with a somewhat bitter laugh. 'If I were one of a boisterous brood of underbred girls I might have a chance of being considered just endurable; but as Lina's sister I am as the shadow to the sunlight; I am like the back of a beautiful picture—a square of dirty canvas.'

'If you are fishing for compliments, you are wasting trouble,' said Gerald. 'It is not a day on which any man will rack his brains in the composition of pretty speeches.'

'May I write the note? May I send the boy?' asked Edgar.

Lina looked at her lover, and finding him consentient, consented; whereupon Edgar hurried off, intensely pleased, to make his arrangements.

So far, he had been disappointed in the hope of seeing Daphne a frequent guest at Hawksyard, the petted companion and plaything of his mother. He had made for himself an almost Arcadian picture: Daphne basking on the stone bench in the Baconian garden; amusing herself with the poultry; even milking a cow on occasion; and making junkets in the

picturesque old dairy. He had fancied her upstairs and downstairs, in my lady's chamber; unearthing all Mrs. Turchill's long-hoarded treasures of laces and ribbons, kept to be looked at rather than to be worn; sorting the house-linen, which would have stocked a Swiss hotel, and which ran the risk of perishing by slow decay upon its shelves or ever it was worn by usage. He had pictured her accepted as the daughter of the house; waking the solemn old echoes with her glad young voice; fondling his dogs; riding his hunters in the green lanes, and across the level fields. She was pining to ride; but of the six horses at South Hill there was not one which Sir Vernon would allow her to mount.

The pleasant picture was as yet only a phantasm of the mind. Mrs. Turchill had not yet taken to Daphne. She was a good woman—truthful, honest, kindhearted—but she had her prejudices, and was passing obstinate.

'I don't deny her prettiness,' she said, when Edgar tried to convince her that not to admire Daphne was a fault in herself, 'but she is not a girl that I could ever make a friend of.'

'That's because you don't take the trouble to know her, mother. If you would ask her here oftener——'

'I hope I know my place, Edgar,' said the mistress of the Grange stiffly. 'If Miss Daphne Lawford wishes to improve my acquaintance she knows where to find me.'

But Daphne had taken no pains to secure to herself the advantages of Mrs. Turchill's friendship. There was no particular reason why she should go to Hawksyard; so, after one solemn afternoon call with Madoline—on which occasion they were received with chilling formality in the best drawing-room; an apartment with an eight-foot oak dado, deeply-recessed mullioned windows, and a state bed-room adjoining—Daphne went there no more. And now here was a splendid opportunity of making her at home in the dear old house, and of showing her all the surroundings which its master loved and cherished.

'BEST OF MOTHERS,' wrote Edgar, 'I am going to take you by storm this afternoon. We—Lina, Daphne, Mr. Goring, and I—are going to Shottery, and propose driving on to Hawksyard afterwards. Get up the best dinner you can at so short a notice, and give us your warmest welcome. You had better put out some of Hirsch's Liebfraumilch and a little dry cham. for Goring. The girls drink only water. Let there be syllabubs and junkets and everything pastoral. Don't ask anyone to meet them,' added Edgar, with a dread of having the local parson projected on his love-feast: 'we want a jolly, free-and-easy evening. Dinner at eight.—Your loving TED.'

This brief epistle was handed to Mrs. Turchill just as she was sitting down to luncheon. Her first idea was to strike.

Her son might have brought home half-a-dozen of his bachelor friends, and it would have been a pleasure to her to kill fatted calves and put out expensive wines. She would have racked her brain to produce an attractive *menu*, and taxed the resources of poultry-yard and dairy to the uttermost. But to be bidden to prepare a feast for Madoline, who had rejected her paragon son, for the rival who had supplanted him, and for Daphne, whom she most cordially disliked, was something too much. She sat at her simple meal bridling and murmuring to herself in subdued revolt. She was tempted to ring for Deborah and confide her wrongs to that sympathetic ear; but discretion and her very genuine love for her son prevailed; and instead of summoning Deborah, she sent for the cook, and announced the dinner party as cheerfully as if it were the fulfilment of a long-cherished desire.

Daphne ran down to the boat-house before the others had finished luncheon, and with Bink's assistance made her boat a picture of comfort. Gerald was excused from the burden of the basket, as that could be conveyed in the carriage which was to pick up the party at Shottery and take them on to Hawksyard. The old name of the boat had been erased for ever by workman-like hands the day after Daphne's futile attempt to obliterate it. 'Nora Creina' now appeared in fresh gilding above the deposed emperor.

'You ought not to have altered it,' said Gerald. 'There was something original in calling your boat after a blood-thirsty lunatic. "Nora Creina" is the essence of Cockneyism.'

'It was the boat-builder's suggestion,' Daphne answered indifferently. 'What's in a name?'

'True! Your boat by any other name would go as fast.'

Daphne had to wait some time by the water's edge before the other three came quietly strolling across the meadow. She had been sculling gently up and down under the willows while she waited.

'Now then, Empress,' said Gerald, when he had arranged Lina's shawls, and settled her comfortably in her place, 'you are to sit beside your sister. Edgar and I will take an oar apiece, while you and Lina amuse us with your conversation.'

This nickname of Empress was a reminiscence of Daphne's adventure in Fontainebleau Forest. It matched very well with her occasional imperiousness, and the association was known only to Gerald Goring and herself. It amused him when he was in a mischievous humour to call her by a name which she never heard without a blush.

'I thought I was to row you,' said Daphne.

'No, Empress; as it's all down stream we of the sterner sex will relieve you of the duty. Besides, you could never row comfortably in that go-to-meeting get-up,' said Gerald, looking

critically at Daphne's straw-coloured Indian silk, embroidered with scarlet poppies and amber wheat-ears, and fluffy with soft lace about the neck and arms, and the Swiss milkmaid's hat with its wreath of cornflowers.

'I could not wear a boating-dress, as we are to dine with Mrs. Turchill,' said Daphne.

'You might have worn what you liked,' protested Edgar eagerly, 'but you look so lovely in that yellow gown that I shall be pleased for my mother to see you in it. She is weak about gowns. I believe she has a wardrobe full of gorgeous attire, which she and Deborah review once a week, but which nobody ever wears.'

'The gowns will do for the chair-covers of a future generation,' said Gerald; 'all the chair-covers in my mother's morning-room are made out of the Court trains of her grandmothers and great-aunts. I believe a Court mantle in those days consumed two yards and a half of stuff.'

He had taken off his coat, and bared his arms to above the elbow.

'What a splendid stroke you pull still, Goring!' said Edgar admiringly, 'and you have the wrist of a navvy.'

'One of my paternal inheritances,' answered Gerald coolly; 'you know my father was a navvy.'

At which frank speech everybody in the boat blushed except the speaker.

'He must have been a glorious fellow,' faltered Edgar, after an awkward pause.

'Any man who can make a million of money, and keep it without leaving speck or flaw upon his good name, must be a glorious fellow,' answered Gerald, with more heartiness than was usual to him. 'My father lived to do good to others as well as to himself, and went down to his grave honoured and beloved. I wish I were more like him.'

'That's the nicest thing I ever heard you say,' exclaimed Daphne.

'Approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley——,' murmured Gerald; 'I am beginning to feel proud of myself.'

They landed at the boat-builder's below the bridge, hard by that decayed old inn which must have seen courtlier company than the waggoners and wayfarers who drink there now. Then they crossed Sir Hugh Clopton's granite bridge, and walked through the quiet town to the meadows that lead to Shottery. It is but a mile from the town to the village, a mile of meadow pathway, every step of which is haunted by ghostly footsteps—the Sacred Way of English literature.

'It's no use telling me not to talk about him,' cried Daphne, as she jumped lightly from the top of a stile, the ascent whereof tested the capacity of a fashionable frock; 'I cannot tread this

ground without thinking of him. I am positively bursting with the idea of him.'

'Which is the fortunate he whose image haunts you?' asked Gerald, with that languid upward twitch of his dark brows which gracefully expressed a mild drawing-room cynicism. 'Do these fields suggest grave thoughts about tenant-right or game-laws, or the land question generally? Is it Beaconsfield or Gladstone whose *eidolon* pursues you?'

'Please don't be disgusting,' cried Daphne. '*Can* one think of anybody in these meadows except——'

'The inevitable William. A man does not live near Stratford with impunity. He must be dosed. Well, child, what are you bursting to say?'

'I have been thinking what a happiness it is to know that the dear creature travelled so little,' responded Daphne; 'and that whether he talks of Bohemia, or France, or Germany, Rome, Verona, Elsinore, or Inverness——'

'Somebody wrote a treatise an inch thick to show that Shakespeare may have gone to Scotland with the king's players, but I fancy he left his case as hypothetical as he found it,' interjected Gerald.

'Whether he talks of Athens—or Africa—he really means Warwickshire,' pursued Daphne. 'It is his own native county that is always present to his mind. Florizel and Perdita make love in our meadows. There is the catalogue of flowers just as they bloom to-day. And Rosalind's cottage was in a lane near the few old oaks which still remain to show where Arden Forest once stood. And poor Ophelia drowned herself in one of the backwaters of our Avon. I can show you the very willow growing aslant the brook.'

'A backwater isn't a brook,' murmured Edgar mildly.

'I allow that local colour is not our William's strong point,' answered Gerald. 'Not being a traveller, he would have done better had he never ventured beyond the limits of his Warwickshire experience; for in that case he would not have imagined lions in the streets of Rome, or a sea-coast in Bohemia.'

'Wait till you write a play or a novel,' retorted Daphne, 'and you'll find you'll have to adapt yourself to circumstances.'

'That's exactly what your divine bard did not do. He adapted circumstances to suit his plays.'

CHAPTER XIV.

'LOVE IS A THING, AS ANY SPIRIT, FREE.'

PAST a garden or two and a few cottages; a long garden wall with heavy coping, shutting in treasures of fruit and vege-

tables; an old inn; a new school-house, built at the corner of a lane shaded by as stately an avenue of elms as any nobleman need desire for the approach to his mansion. And yet mansion there is none at the end of this verdant aisle. The lane is only an accommodation road leading to somebody's farm. A youthful monitor is trying to drill some small boys in front of the school-porch, and the small boys are defying him; whereat a shrill-voiced woman, unseen in the interior of the school, calls out an occasional word of reproof. All the houses in the little village belong to the past—they have the grace of a day that is dead. In a farm garden a buxom servant in a kilted petticoat is feeding a family of gigantic hens and chickens with something thick and slab out of an iron pot.

Daphne and her companions felt that there could have been little change since the old romantic Elizabethan time. The village lay off the beaten tracks. Three or four modern houses, scattered about here and there in spacious gardens, were the only addition time had made to Shottery.

They walked briskly along the narrow road, across the bridge where the shallow streamlet came tumbling picturesquely over gray stones. Then a few paces, and before them stood the little block of cottages which genius has transformed into a temple. Whether the building was originally one house, it were difficult to decide. The levels are different; but a variety in levels was the order of that day. The whole block is a timber-framed structure—a panelled house, the panels filled with dab and wattle. Jutting casements, diamond-paned, look out upon an ancient garden, and an ancient well. Beside the house and garden there is an old orchard, where on this day a couple of sheep are placidly nibbling the sweet grass. The cottage is almost smothered in greenery. Honeysuckle, jasmine, roses, hang about the walls as if they loved them. The old timber porch is curtained with flowers.

The South Hill carriage was waiting in the lane when Daphne and her companions arrived. The basket had been duly delivered over to Mrs. Baker. She was standing at the door awaiting them with a smiling welcome.

'So glad to see you, ladies. The kettle's on the boil, and you can have your tea as soon as you please.'

'Thanks, you dear thing,' cried Daphne; 'but isn't it almost sacrilege to drink tea in his room?'

'It isn't everybody I'd let do it, miss; not any of those Americans; though I must say they're uncommonly civil, and know more about Shakespeare than the common run of English do, and are more liberal in their ways too,' added Mrs. Baker, with a lively remembrance of half-crowns from Transatlantic visitors.

'Mrs. Baker,' began Daphne in a solemn tone, laying a little

tawny-gloved hand lightly on the collar of Gerald's coat, 'you see this man?'

'Yes, miss, and a very nice-looking gentleman he is for anybody to look at,' answered Mrs. Baker smirkingly, making up her mind that the tall dark-eyed gentleman must belong to one or other of the two young ladies.

'He may be nice to the outward eye,' said Daphne gravely, 'but he is dust and ashes inside. He is anathema maranatha, or he ought to be, if there were anybody in Warwickshire who knew how to anathematise him properly. He lives in this county —within twelve miles of this house—and he has never been to see the ingle-nook where Shakespeare courted his wife. I'm afraid it won't make the faintest impression upon his callous mind when I tell him that you are a lineal descendant of the Hathaways, and that this house has never been out of a Hathaway's possession since Shakespeare's time.'

'I appreciate the lady for her own sake, and don't care a jot for her ancestry,' answered Gerald, with a friendly air.

They followed Mrs. Baker into the house-place, where all was cool and shadowy after the glare of sunshine outside. It was a low but somewhat spacious room, with casements looking back and front; recessed casements, furnished with oaken seats, one of which was known as the lovers' seat; for here, the lovers of the present day argued by analogy, William and Ann must have sat to watch many a sunset, and many a moonlit sky. Here they must have whispered their foolish lovers' talk in the twilight, and shyly kissed at parting. The fire-place was in a deep recess, a roomy ingle-nook where half-a-dozen people could have gathered comfortably round the broad open hearth. On one side of the ingle-nook was a cupboard in the wall, known as the bacon-cupboard; on the other the high-backed settle. Opposite the fire-place there was a noble old dresser—polished oak or mahogany—with turned legs and a good deal of elaborate carpentry: a dresser which was supposed to be Elizabethan, but which was suggestive rather of the Carolian period. The dark brown panels made an effective background for an old willow dinner-service.

Daphne made Mr. Goring explore every inch of the house which Mrs. Baker was able conveniently to show. She led him up a breakneck little staircase, showed him lintels and doorposts, and locks and bolts, which had been extant in Shakespeare's time; made him admire the queer little carved four-poster which was even older than the poet's epoch; and the old fine linen sheet, richly worked by patient fingers, which had been in the family for centuries, only used at a birth or a death. She excused him from nothing; and he bore the infliction with calm resignation, and allowed her to lead him back to the house-place in triumph.

Madoline and Edgar Turchill were sitting in the lovers' seat, talking, after having unpacked the basket, and made all preparation for tea, assisted by Mrs. Baker's modest handmaiden.

'Now, Mr. Goring,' said Daphne, when she and Gerald and the old lady had rejoined the others, 'how do you feel about that Channel Island cow?'

'Oh, I am content,' answered Gerald, laughing at her. 'I submit to the extortion; you carry matters with such a high hand that if you were to demand all my flocks and herds I should hardly feel surprised.'

'Mrs. Baker,' said Daphne, with a businesslike air, 'this gentleman is going to give you a cow.'

'Oh, miss, you don't mean it, surely!' murmured Mrs. Baker, overcome with confusion.

'Yes; a lovely fawn-coloured, hazel-eyed Alderney. Don't refuse her. He can as well afford to give you a cow as I can to give you a neck-ribbon. When would you like the animal sent home? To-morrow morning? Yes, of course; to-morrow morning. You hear, Mr. Goring? And now you may consider yourself forgiven, and I'll show you the visitors'-book and all the interesting autographs.'

They went over to the table near the window, and turned the leaves of that volume! Alas! how many a hand that had written in it was now dust. Here was the signature of Charles Dickens, nearly thirty years old, and pale with age. But the descendant of the Hathaways remembered the day when it was written, and recalled the visit with pride.

'He took the book out into the garden, and sat on the stone slab over the well to write his name,' she said. 'I remember how full of life and fun he and Mr. Mark Lemon were; he was laughing as he wrote, and he looked at everything, and was so pleased and so pleasant.'

Sir Walter Scott's name was in an older book. Both of these were as dead—and as undying—as Shakespeare. And compared with these two immortal names all the rest of the signatures in the big book were zero.

It was the merriest tea-party imaginable. Mrs. Baker's best Pembroke table had been brought into the middle of the room; her best tea-pot and cups and saucers were set out upon it. Cakes and hot-house fruit had been liberally supplied by Mrs. Spicer. Daphne whispered in her sister's ear a request that Mrs. Baker might be invited to join them, to which Madoline nodded a smiling assent. Was not the descendant of the Hathaways a lady by right of her gentle manners and ancient descent? She belonged to a class that is an honour to the land—the honest independent yeoman who tills the soil his forefathers cultivated before him. The birth and death sheet in the oak chest upstairs was like a patent of nobility. And yet perhaps not one of these

agricultural Hathaways had ever enjoyed as large an income as a first-class mechanic in a manufacturing town—a man who dies and leaves not a rap behind him to show that he was once respectable. They had been upheld in their places by the pride of race, which the mechanic knows not.

Mrs. Baker was installed in the place of honour in front of the tea-tray, and asked everyone in her nice old-fashioned way whether their tea was to their liking. Upon being coaxed to talk she told stories about the defunct Hathaways, and explained how the house that had once been all one dwelling-place had come to be divided.

It was Daphne and she who supplied the conversation. The two young men looked on amused; Edgar openly admiring the bright changeful face under the little Swiss hat. Lina was pleased that her sister should be so innocently glad.

'O, how happy I am,' cried Daphne suddenly, in a pause of the talk, clasping her hands above her head in a kind of ecstasy. 'If it could only last!'

'Why should it not last?' asked Edgar, in his matter-of-fact way.

Gerald looked at her gravely, with a puzzled look. Yes; this was the girl who had stood in the dazzling sunshine beside the lake at Fontainebleau, in whose hand he had read the forecast of an evil fate.

'God help her!' he thought, 'she is so impulsive—such a creature of the moment. How is such an one to travel safely through the thorny ways of life? Happily there seems little fear of thorniness for her footsteps. Here is my honest Turchill dying for her—and just the kind of man to make her an excellent husband, and give the lie to palmistry. Yet it seems a common-place fate; almost as vulgar as the Italian warehouse in Oxford Street.'

He sat musing thus in the lazy afternoon atmosphere, and watching Daphne with something of an artistic rather than an actually friendly interest. It seemed a shallow nature that must be always expressing itself in speech or movement. There could be no depth of thought allied with such vivacity—keenness of feeling, perhaps, but for the moment only.

Nobody was in a hurry to leave the cottage. Tea-drinking is of all sensualities the most intellectual. The mind is refreshed rather than the body. There was nothing coarse in the meal. The golden tinge of the almond pound-cake—a master work of Mrs. Spicer's—contrasted with the purple bloom of grapes and blue-gages, the olive tint of ripe figs.

'We are making such a tremendous meal that I'm afraid we shall none of us do justice to my mother's dinner,' remonstrated Edgar at last, 'and that will make her miserable.'

'A quarter to seven,' said Gerald, stealing a glance at a little

effeminate watch. 'Don't you think it is time we should descend from this Shakespearian empyrean to common earth?'

This was the signal for a general move. The heavy, comfortable-looking old carriage-horses had been walked up and down in shady places, while the portly coachman dozed on his box, and the more vivacious footman execrated the flies. And now the landau bowled briskly along the smooth high road to Hawksyard, containing as cheerful a quartette as ever went out to dinner.

Madoline was delighted to see her sister so happy, delighted at Edgar's obvious devotion. She had no doubt that his love would be rewarded in due course. It is in a woman's nature to be grateful for such honest affection, to be won by such disinterested fidelity.

The brazen hands of the old clock at Hawksyard indicated a quarter to eight, as the carriage drove across the bridge, and under the arched gateway into the quadrangular garden, with its sunk pathways, and shallow steps, and border-lines of crumbling old stone. Mrs. Turchill was standing on the threshold—a dignified figure in a gray poplin gown and old thread-lace cap and ruffles—ready to receive them. She gave Madoline her blandest smile, and was tolerably gracious to the rival who had spoiled her son's chances; but she could not bring herself to be cordial to Daphne. Her silk bodice became as rigid as an Elizabethan corset when she greeted that obnoxious damsel. She had a shrewd suspicion that it was for her sake the fatted calf had been killed, and all the available cream in the dairy squandered upon sweets and made dishes, with a reckless disregard of next Saturday's butter-making. Yet as Daphne shyly put out her hand to accept that cold greeting, too sensitive not to perceive the matron's unfriendliness, Mrs. Turchill could but own to herself that the minx was passing lovely. The brilliant gray eyes, shadowed with dark lashes; the dark brows and golden hair; the complexion of lilies and roses; the sensitive mouth; the play of life and colour in a face that varied with every thought—yes; this made beauty which even Mrs. Turchill could not deny.

'Handsome is that handsome does,' thought the dowager. 'God forbid that my boy should trust the happiness of his life to such a butterfly.'

Inwardly rebellious, she had nevertheless done her duty as a good housekeeper. The old oak daboed drawing room was looking its prettiest, brightened by oriental jars and bowls of scarlet geraniums and creamy roses, lavender and honeysuckle. The silver chandelier and fire-irons were resplendent with recent polishing. The diamond-paned lattices were opened to admit the scent of heliotrope and mignonette from the garden on the other side of the moat; while one deeply-recessed window look

ing into the quadrangle let in the perfume of the old-world flowers Francis Bacon loved.

Edgar insisted upon showing Daphne the house during the ten minutes before dinner.

'You have only been here once,' he said, 'and my mother did not show you anything.'

After the two girls had taken off their hats in the state bedchamber next the drawing-room—a room whose walls were panelled with needlework executed by an ancestress of Edgar's in the reign of Charles the First—they all went off to explore the house; ascending a steep secret stair which they entered from a door in the panelling of the dining-room; exploring long slippery corridors and queer little rooms that opened mysteriously out of other rooms; and triangular dressing-closets squeezed into a corner between a chimney and an outer-wall; laughing at the old furniture: the tall toppling four-post bedsteads; the sage-green tapestry; the capacious old grates, or still older brazen dogs; the inimitable Dutch tiles.

'It must be heavenly to live in such a funny old house,' cried Daphne, as they came cautiously down the black oak staircase, slippery as glass, pausing to admire a ramshackle collection of Indian curios and Japanese pottery on the broad window-ledge halfway down.

'If you would only try it,' murmured Edgar close in her ear, and looking ineffably sheepish as he spoke.

Again the all-significant words fell unheeded. She skipped lightly down the remaining stairs, protesting she could get accustomed to them in no time.

'"So light a foot will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint,"' said Gerald.

'Didn't I tell you so? You can't live without quoting him,' cried Daphne triumphantly.

The dinner went off merrily. It was a capital dinner in a good old English style, ponderous but excellent. There were none of those refinements which distinguished the board over which Mrs. Ferrers presided. The attempts at elegance smacked of a banished era. A turbot decorated with sliced lemon and barberries; a befrilled haunch, exhibiting its noble proportions in a heavy silver dish; a superabundance of creams and jellies and trifles and syllabubs; an elaborate dessert lying in state on the sideboard, to be slowly and laboriously transferred to the polished oak after the cloth was drawn; and the coachman to help wait at table. The whole thing was rustic and old-fashioned, and Edgar was afraid Daphne was secretly turning it all into ridicule. Yet she seemed happy, and she said so much in praise of Hawksyard and of the perfect order in which the house was kept, that Mrs. Turchill's heart began to soften towards her.

'You seem fond of the country, and of countrified ways, Miss Daphne, said the matron relentingly. 'Yet I should have thought a young lady like you would have been pining for London, and balls and theatres.'

'I never was at a dance in my life,' answered Daphne, 'and only once at a theatre, and that was the great opera-house in Paris. I don't think I should ever care to go to a meaner theatre. My thoughts went up so high that night, I shouldn't like to let them down again by seeing trumpery.'

'The London theatres are very nice,' said Mrs. Turchill, not quite following Daphne's idea. 'But they are rather warm in summer. Yet one likes to go up to town in the height of the season. There is so much to see.'

'Mother's constitution is cast-iron when she gets to London,' said Edgar. 'She is up at six every morning, and goes to the picture-galleries as soon as the doors are opened; and does her morning in Hyde Park, and her afternoon in Regent Street, shopping, or staring in at the shop-windows; and eats her dinner at the most crowded restaurant I can take her to: and winds up at the theatre. I believe she'd accept a lobster-supper in the Haymarket if I were to offer one.'

'Has Miss Daphne Lawford never been in London?' asked Mrs. Turchill.

'Oh, please don't call me miss. I am never anything but Daphne to my friends.'

'You are very kind,' answered Mrs. Turchill, stiffening; 'but I don't think I could take so great a liberty with you on such a short acquaintance.'

'Short acquaintance!' echoed Daphne, laughing. 'Why, you must have known me when I was in my cradle.'

Mrs. Turchill grew suddenly red, as if the idea were embarrassing.

'I was invited to your christening,' she said; 'but—afterwards—there were circumstances—Sir Vernon was so often abroad. We did not see much of you.'

'If you wish me to feel at home at Hawksyard you must call me Daphne, please,' said the girl gently.

Mrs. Turchill did not wish her to feel at home at Hawksyard; yet she could not refuse compliance with so gracious a request.

The ladies rose to retire, Edgar opening the door for them.

'Do you want any more wine, Turchill?' asked Gerald.

'No, not particularly; but you'll try that other claret, won't you?'

'Not a drop of it. I vote we all adjourn to the garden.'

So they all went out together into the twilit quadrangle, where the old-fashioned flowers were folding their petals for night and slumber, while the moon was rising above a cluster

of stone chimneys. Mrs. Turchill walked once round the little enclosure, discoursing graciously with Madoline, and then confessed to feeling chilly, and being afraid of the night air; although a very clever doctor, with somewhat new-fangled ideas, had told her that the air was as good by night as by day, provided the weather were dry.

'I think I'll go indoors and sit in the drawing-room till you come in to tea,' she said. 'I hope you won't think me rude.'

Madoline offered to go with her, but this Mrs. Turchill would not allow.

'Young people enjoy a moonlight stroll,' she said; 'I liked it myself when I was your age. There's no occasion for any of you to hurry. I shall amuse myself with *The Times*. I haven't looked at it yet.'

The four being left together naturally divided themselves into two couples. Gerald and Lina seemed fascinated by the flowery quadrangle, with its narrow walks, and ancient dial, on which the moon was now shining. They strolled slowly up and down the paths; or lingered beside the dial; or stood looking down at the fish-pond. Daphne's restless spirit soon tired of these narrow bounds.

'Is there nothing else to look at?' she asked.

'There are the stables, and the dairy, and the farm-yard. But you must see those by daylight; you must come here for a long day,' said Edgar eagerly. 'Would you like to see the garden on the other side of the moat?'

'Above all things.'

'It is very flat,' said Edgar apologetically.

'All the better for tennis.'

'Yes, the lawn would make a magnificent tennis-ground. We might have eight courts if we liked. But it is a very common-place garden after South Hill.'

'Don't apologise. I am sure it is nice; a dear old-fashioned sort of garden—hollyhocks, and sunflowers, and things.'

'My old gardener is rather proud of his hollyhocks.'

'Precisely; I knew he would be. And that horrid MacCloskie will hear of nothing but the newest inventions in flowers. He gives us floral figures in Euclid; floral hearthrugs sprawling over the lawn, as if one of the housemaids had taken out a Persian rug to dust it, and had forgotten to take it in again. He takes tremendous pains to build up beds like supper-dishes—ornamental salads, don't you know—and calls that high-art gardening. I would rather have your hollyhocks and sunflowers, and the old-fashioned scented clematis climbing about everywhere in a tangled mass of sweetness.'

'I'm glad you like antiquated gardens,' said Edgar.

They went under the archway, which echoed the sound of their footsteps, and round by a gravel walk to the spacious lawn,

and the long border which was the despair of the gardeners when they tried to fill it, and which yet provided flowers enough to keep all the sitting-rooms bright and sweet with summer bloom. The moon was high above Hawksyard by this time: a glorious harvest moon, pouring down her golden light upon tree and flower, and giving intensity to the shadows under the wall. The waters of the moat looked black, save where the moonbeams touched them; and yonder under the tall spreading walnut boughs the gravel walk was all in shadow.

Daphne paced the lawn, disputing as to how many tennis-courts one might have on such on extensive parallelogram. She admired the height of the hollyhocks, and regretted that their colour did not show by moonlight. The sunflowers appeared to better advantage.

'What awful stories poets tell about them!' said Daphne. 'Just look at that brazen-faced creature, smirking at the moon; just as if she had never turned her head sunwards in her life.'

Edgar was in a sentimental mood, and inclined to see things from a sentimental point of view.

'It mayn't be botanically true,' he said, 'but it's a pretty idea all the same;' and then he trolled out in a fine baritone:

> 'No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
> But as truly loves on to the close;
> As the sunflower turns on her god, when he sets,
> The same look which she turned when he rose.'

'What's the use of singing that when you know it isn't true?' cried Daphne contemptuously. 'Do you suppose a stiff-necked thing like that, with a stalk a quarter of an inch in diameter, could turn and twist from east to west every day, without wringing its head off? The idea is obviously absurd. What lovely old walnut-trees!' she exclaimed, looking across the lawn. 'Centuries upon centuries old, are they not?'

'I believe they were planted soon after George the Third came to the throne.'

'Is that all? They look as old as the Wrekin.'

They strolled across the wide lawn, and in among the shadows of the old trees. The cows were moving stealthily about in the meadow on the other side of the fence, as if sleep were the last thing they ever thought of.

'And you really like Hawksyard?' demanded Edgar earnestly.

'Like it! I think it is quite the most delicious place I ever saw. Those high dadoes; these deep-set stone-mullioned windows; those eccentric little bed-rooms; that secret staircase, so sweetly suggestive of murder and treason. The whole place is so thoroughly original.'

'It is one of the few moated granges left in England,' said Edgar with an air of conscious merit.

'It is quite too lovely.'

'Daphne, do you really mean what you say?' he asked with sudden intensity. 'Are you only talking like this to please me —out of kindness?'

'If I have a fault it is a habit of blurting out what I think, without reference to other people's feelings. I am thoroughly in earnest about Hawksyard.'

'Then be it's mistress,' exclaimed Edgar, taking her hand, and trying to draw her towards him; 'be queen of my house, darling, as you have long been sovereign of my heart. Make me the happiest man that ever yonder old roof sheltered—the proudest, the most entirely blest. Daphne, I am not poetical, or clever. I can't find many words, but—I love you—I love you.'

She laughed in his face, a clear and silvery peal—laughed him to absolute scorn; yet without a touch of ill-nature.

'My dear Edgar, this is too much,' she cried. 'A few months ago you were fondly, devotedly, irrevocably in love with Lina. Don't you remember how we sympathised that afternoon in the meadows? This is the sunflower over again: first to the sun and then to the moon. No, dear Edgar, never talk to me of love. I have a real honest regard for you. I respect you. I trust you as my very brother. It would spoil all if you were to persist in talking nonsense of this kind.'

She left him, planted there—mute as a statue—frozen with mortification, humiliation, despair.

> 'He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all.'

He had tried his fate—hopefully, confidently even—lured on by her deceptive sweetness; and all was lost.

She had run lightly off. She was on the other side of the lawn before he stirred from the attitude in which she left him; his hands clenched, his head bent, his eyes staring stupidly at the gravel walk.

'She does not care a straw for me,' he said to himself, 'not a straw. And I thought she had grown fond of me. I thought I had but to speak.'

A friendly hand touched him lightly on the shoulder. It was Gerald, the man for whom Fate had reserved all good things—unbounded talents, unbounded wealth, the love of a perfect woman.

'Cheer up, old fellow,' said Gerald heartily. 'Forgive me if I heard more than you intended me to hear. Mrs. Turchill sent me in quest of you and Daphne, and I came up—just as you—'

'Just as I made an ass of myself,' interrupted Edgar. 'It

doesn't matter. I don't a bit mind your knowing. I have no pride of that kind. I am proud of loving her, even in vain.'

'Don't be down-hearted, man. A girl of that kind must be played as an expert angler plays a frisky young salmon. She has refused you to-night; she may accept you three months hence.'

'She laughed at me,' said Edgar, with deepest despondency.

'It is her disposition to laugh at all things. You must have patience, man; patience and persistence. "My love is but a lassie yet." Thy beloved one still delights in the green fields; her tender neck cannot bear the yoke. Wait, and she will turn to thee—as—as the sunflower turns to the sun,' concluded Gerald, having vainly sought a better comparison.

'It doesn't,' cried Edgar dejectedly. 'That is what we have just been talking about. The sunflower is a stiff-necked impostor.'

CHAPTER XV.

'NOT FOR YOUR LINAGE, NE FOR YOUR RICHESSE.'

THE two young men walked up and down under the walnut-trees for nearly an hour, Gerald Goring playing the unaccustomed part of consoler. He liked Edgar Turchill with an honest liking. There was a shade of condescension, of unconscious patronage, in the feeling; but it was thoroughly sincere. The Saxon squire was of course distinctly on a lower intellectual level than the man of mixed race—the man whose father had thrust himself into the front ranks of life by the sheer force of will and brains, unaided by conventional training of any kind; whose mother had been the last development of a family reared in courts and palaces. Compared with the quicksilver that flowed in his own veins, Edgar Turchill's blood was a fluid that smacked of the vegetable kingdom—watery stuff such as oozes out of a turnip or a cabbage when the cook-maid cuts it. Yet the man could feel, and so keenly, that Gerald was touched with tender pity.

'Don't be down-hearted old fellow,' he said, walking slowly under the spreading boughs, with his hand resting affectionately upon Turchill's shoulder. 'Be sure things will work round in time. She is a pert capricious minx; but she cannot help being fond of you, if you are only patient.'

'I would wait for her as Jacob waited for Rachel, if I were as sure of winning her,' answered Edgar; 'but I am afraid there's no chance. If she detested me; if the very sight of me were odious to her; there might be some hope. But she likes me—she is even fond of me; in a calm sisterly way. If you

knew how sweet she was to me in the spring before you came —she had no fits of temper then—when I taught her sculling ; how she used to boil a kettle down in the boat-house and——'

'Yes ; it was awfully nice of her,' interjected Gerald somewhat impatiently, having heard the story of these boat-house breakfasts several times before.

'If she were less kind I should have more hope,' pursued Edgar. 'I think I shall go away—out of the country—where I shall never see her lovely face. I have a great mind to go to India and shoot big game.'

'And stick pigs?—a curious cure for the heart-ache. No, old fellow ; stay at home and bide your time. That's your game.'

'I could never look her in the face after to-night,' said Edgar.

'Nonsense, man! Treat this capricious minx as coolly as if nothing had ever been said about love and despair. Let her think to-night's avowal the consequence of too much wine—a mere after-dinner outburst of sentiment. Look her in the face, forsooth! If you are a wise man, you may make her ashamed to look you in the face before she is six months older. You have spoilt her by your flatteries and foolings and compliances. Give her a little of the rough side of your bark. She professes to care for you as a brother, quotha! Treat her with brotherly discourtesy—brotherly indifference. Be as candid about her faults and follies as if you were her very brother. When she finds you can live without her she will begin to languish for the old adulation.'

'I love her too well to be such a Jesuit,' said Edgar.

'Pshaw! do you suppose Petruchio did not love Kate? He knew there was but one way of taming his fair shrew, and he used the wisdom Heaven had given him.'

'I couldn't act a part where she is concerned,' argued Edgar. 'She would find me out in a moment.'

They talked for a long time upon the same subject, wearing the theme threadbare ; travelling backwards and forwards over the same line of argument, while the moon climbed higher and higher in the cloudless blue ; and in the end Edgar acknowledged that it would be a foolish thing to leave his farm before the harvest was all in ; or his mother, before she had enjoyed her annual fortnight at the sea-side ; or to uproot himself violently from his native soil in the vain hope of curing his heart-wound. He had tried foreign air for his malady before, and foreign air had done nothing for him ; and this time he believed the wound to be ever so much deeper. A lifetime in a strange country would hardly heal it.

At last Edgar consented to be led despondently back to the house, which he had left a little while ago with his heart beat-

ing high, full of hope and delight. They found the three ladies seated in the quaint old drawing-room, dimly lighted by a dozen or so of candles in the silver sconces against the wall There was nothing so distinctly modern as a moderator-lamp at Hawksyard.

Mrs. Turchill was enlarging mildly in a lowered voice upon the various shortcomings of her servants, who, although old servants and infinitely better than other people's, were yet so far human in their faultiness as to afford food for conversation. Madoline was listening with polite interest, throwing in an encouraging word now and then, which was hardly needed, for Mrs. Turchill's monologue would have gone on just the same without it. Daphne, exhausted by a long day's vivacity, had fallen asleep, bolt erect in a straight-backed cherry-wood chair.

Gerald Goring remembered that day at Fontainebleau when he had told himself that Daphne asleep would be a very commonplace young person; yet, as he looked at her to-night, he was fain to own that even in slumber she was lovely. Was it some trick of candlelight and shadow which gave such piquancy to the delicate features, which gave such expression to the dark-pencilled brows and drooping eyelids? The bright hair, the pale yellow gown, the exquisite fairness of the complexion, gave a lily-like loveliness to the whole figure. So pale; so pure; so little earthly.

'Poor Edgar!' sighed Mr. Goring. 'He is very much to be pitied. How desperately I could have loved such a girl, if I had not already adored her opposite. And how I would have made her love me,' he added, remembering all their foolish talk, and how easy it had seemed to him to play upon that sensitive nature.

'I am afraid the tea is cold,' said Mrs. Turchill. 'You gentlemen have been enjoying your cigars in the walnut walk, I suppose.'

The clatter of cups and saucers startled Daphne. She opened her eyes, and saw Edgar looking at her with piteous reproachfulness. She could calmly sleep just after giving him his death-wound. There was a refinement of cruelty in such indifference. Then he suddenly remembered Gerald's advice, and tried to seem equally at his ease.

'I'll wager mother has been bemoaning the vices of the new dairymaid, and the ingratitude of the old one in going away to be married,' said he. 'That's what sent you to sleep, wasn't it, Daphne?'

'I was tired. We had such a long afternoon,' she answered wearily.

'The carriage has been waiting half an hour,' said Madoline. 'I think we had better put on our hats, and then say good-night.'

'Mr. Goring will drive home with you, of course,' said Mrs. Turchill.

'Yes; I am going to see them safe home, Mrs. Turchill,' answered Gerald. 'I am to stay at South Hill to night, and hear Sir Vernon's account of the Yeomanry dinner.'

Edgar, who had just been talking of eternal banishment, was longing to ask for the fourth seat in the landau. The walk home between midnight and morning would be delightful.

'I should have liked to hear about the dinner,' he began dubiously; and then meeting Gerald's eye, quailed beneath its friendly ridicule, and said no more.

He escorted Daphne to the carriage, helped to arrange her wraps with a steady hand, though his heart beat passionately all the time; and bade her good-night in so thoroughly cheery a voice, that she wondered a little to find how easily he had taken her rejection of him.

'Poor dear Edgar!' she said to herself as they drove along the shadowy Warwickshire lane, through the calm beauty of the summer night, 'I daresay it was only an impulse of the moment—or perhaps it was the moon—that made him propose to me. Yet he seemed awfully in earnest, and I was afraid I might have offended him by laughing. But, after being devoted to Lina, and making me the confidante of his grief, it was certainly rather impertinent to offer himself to me. But he is a dear good-natured creature all the same, and I should be sorry to offend him.'

She was silent all the way home; sitting in her comfortable corner of the carriage, wrapped to her chin in her soft white shawl, to all appearance asleep. Yet not once did her senses lose themselves in slumber. She was listening to the happy lovers, as they talked of the past—that part of the past which they had spent asunder. Gerald had been talking of a long mule-ride in Switzerland under just such a moonlit sky. It was no tremendous mountain ascent, only a ride from Evian up to a village at the foot of the Dent d'Oche, to look down upon Lake Leman and its lovely shores bathed in moonlight; the long dark range of the Jura rising like a wall on the western side; picturesque villages on the banks gleaming in the silver light, with their old church towers half hidden by masses of dark foliage; one lonely boat with its twin sails skimming like a swallow across the moonlit water.

'It must have been delicious,' said Lina.

'It was very nice—except that you were not there. "But one thing want these banks of Rhine."'

'And did you really miss me at such moments, Gerald? When you were looking at some especially lovely scene, had you really and truly a feeling that I ought to have been by your side?'

'Really and truly: the better half of myself was missing. Pleasure was only a one-sided affair, as that moon will appear next week—an uncomfortable-looking fragmentary kind of planet.'

'I love to hear of your travels, Gerald,' said Lina softly. 'Have you told me all about them, do you think?'

'All that's worth telling, I fancy,' he answered lightly, with an involuntary glance at Daphne to see if she were really asleep.

There was no quiver of the dark lashes, no movement in the restful figure. Her face had that pale unearthly look which all faces have in the moonlight. A pain shot through his heart as he thought that it was thus she would look in death. It was one of those involuntary flashes of thought which sometimes flit across a mind unacquainted with actual sorrow—the phantom of a grief that might be.

When they arrived at South Hill Daphne wished her sister and Mr. Goring a brief good-night, and went straight to her room. She had no motive for awaiting her father's home-coming. He would have nothing to say to her. His only greeting would be a look which seemed to ask what business she had there. It was on the stroke of eleven. Madoline and Gerald walked up and down the gravel drive in front of the house, waiting for the carriage from Warwick; and during this interval Mr. Goring told his sweetheart how Edgar Turchill had been rejected by Daphne. Madoline was deeply distressed by this news. She had made up her mind that her sister's life was to be made happy in this particular way. She had imagined a fair and peaceful future in which she would be living at the Abbey, and Daphne at Hawksyard—not a dozen miles apart. And now this wilful Daphne had rejected the moated grange and its owner, and that fair picture of the future had no more reality in it than a mirage city seen from the dreary sands of a desert.

'I thought she was attached to him,' said Madoline, when she had been told the whole story. 'She has encouraged him to come here; she has always seemed happy in his company. Half her life, since she came from school, has been spent with him.'

'In sober earnest, darling, I'm afraid this fascinating little sister of yours is an arrant coquette. She has flirted with Edgar because there was no one else to flirt with.'

'Please don't say that, Gerald, for I know you are mistaken,' answered Madoline eagerly. 'Daphne is no flirt. She looks upon Edgar as a kind of adopted brother. I have always known that, but I fancied that this friendly trustful feeling of hers would lead in time to a warmer attachment. As to coquetry, she does not know what it means. She is thoroughly childlike and innocent.'

'Possibly, dearest. Yet in her childishness she knows how to fool a man as thoroughly as Ninon de l'Enclos could have done after half a century's practice. However, I hope Edgar will stand his ground and bring this wayward puss to her senses.'

'I cannot understand how she can help liking him,' mused Madoline. 'He is so good, so frank, and brave, and true.'

'All noble qualities, and deserving a woman's affection. Yet the sentimental history of the human race tends to show that a man endowed with all those virtues is not the most dangerous to the fair sex.'

'Gerald,' said Lina, 'I have an idea that pride is at the bottom of Daphne's refusal.'

'Why pride? What kind of pride?'

'She has harped a good deal, at different times, upon her penniless position; has called herself a pauper, half in joke, half in earnest, but with a bitterness of tone that wounded me. She may think that as Edgar is well off, and she has no fortune, she ought not to accept him.'

'My dearest love, what an utterly quixotic idea. The only thought a pretty young woman ever has about a man's wealth is that when she shall be his wife she can have more frocks than the common run of women. There is no sense of obligation. She is so conscious of the boon she bestows that she accepts his filthy lucre as a matter of course.'

'I don't think that would be Daphne's way of thinking.'

'Dearest, if she were wholly your sister I should say not. But as she is only your half-sister, I can suppose her only about half as good again as the ruck of womankind.'

'You are very rich, are you not, Gerald?'

'Well, yes; it would take a large amount of idiocy on my part to spoil the income my father left me. It might be done, no doubt, if I went into the right circles. My ruin would be only a question of so many years and so many racehorses. But while I live as I am living now, there is very little chance of my becoming acquainted with want.'

'I know, dear; and I don't think it was for the sake of my fortune you chose me, was it, Gerald?'

'My dearest love, I only wish some old nurse would turn up on your wedding morning and tell you that you are not the Lady Clare, so that I might prove to you how little wealth or position influenced my choice. I think I know what you are going to say, Lina. As I have more money than you and I together—indulge our caprices as we may—are ever likely to spend, why not give your fortune to Daphne?'

'Dear Gerald, how good of you to guess my wish! I should like to divide my fortune with my sister when I come of age. I don't want to give her all, for half would be ample. And I am so accustomed to the idea of independence, that I should

hardly like to be a pensioner even upon you. Will you speak to the lawyers, Gerald, and find out how the gift had better be made?

'Yes, dear: I'll settle everything with the men of law. It seems to me that you can do just what you like, as soon as you come of age. But you'll have to wait till then.'

'Only ascertain that it can be done, Gerald, and then I can tell Daphne, and she will no longer fancy herself a pauper. It may influence her in her conduct to Edgar.'

'It may,' answered Gerald dubiously; 'but somehow I don't think it will. Edgar must win the game off his own bat.'

The sisters were alone together in Madoline's morning-room after breakfast next day. Gerald had gone to the Abbey to look after the builders, and settle various matters with his steward. Daphne was sitting half in and half out of the balcony, idle as was natural to her, but listless and discontented-looking, which was a state of mind she did not often exhibit.

There was no Edgar this morning, and she missed her faithful slave.

Perhaps he meant never to come to South Hill any more; in which case it would be difficult for her to get rid of her life.

'Daphne,' began Madoline gravely, 'I have heard something which has made me very unhappy; which has altogether surprised and disappointed me. I am told that Edgar proposed to you last night, and that you refused him.'

'Did he send you the news in a telegram?' asked Daphne, flaming red. 'I don't see how else you could have heard it.'

'No matter how I heard it, dear. It is the truth, I suppose.'

'Yes; it is the truth. But I despise him for telling you,' answered Daphne angrily.

'It was not he who told me. It was Gerald, who by accident overheard the end of your conversation with Edgar, and who——'

'What! he has been interfering, has he?' cried Daphne, looking still more angry. 'It is supremely impertinent of him to busy himself about my affairs.'

'Daphne! Is that the way you speak of my future husband—your future brother?'

'He has no right to dictate whom I am to accept or reject. What can it matter to him?'

'He does not presume to dictate: but it does matter a great deal to him that my sister should choose the path in life which is most likely to lead to happiness.'

'How can he tell which path will lead me to happiness? Does he suppose that I am going to have a husband chosen for me—as if I were a wretched French girl educated in a convent?'

'He thought—just as I thought—that you could hardly help liking such a thoroughly good fellow as Edgar; a man so devoted to you; so unselfish; such a good son.'

'What have I to do with his virtues? I don't care a straw for him, except as a friendly sort of creature who will do anything I ask him, and who is very nice to play tennis or billiards with. He ought not to be offended at my refusing him. It would have been all the same had he been anyone else. I shall never marry.'

'But why not, Daphne?'

'Oh, for no particular reason: except perhaps that I am too fond of my own way, and shouldn't like a master.'

'Daphne, there is something in your tone that alarms me. It is so unnatural in a girl of your age. While you were at Asnières, did you ever see anyone—you were such a child, that it seems foolish to ask such a question—but was there anyone at Asnières whom——'

'Whom I fell in love with? No, dearest, there was no one at Asnières. Madame Tolmache was most judicious in her selection of masters. I don't think the most romantic schoolgirl, fed upon three-volume novels, could have fancied herself in love even with the best-looking of them.'

'I can't make you out, Daphne. Yet I think you might be very happy as Edgar Turchill's wife. It would be so nice for us to be living in the same county, within a few miles of each other.'

'Yes, that would be nice; and it would be nicer to be at Hawksyard than to stay at South Hill when you are gone. Yet you see I have too much self-respect to perjure myself, and pretend to return poor Edgar's affection.'

'I have been thinking, Daphne, that perhaps some sense of mistaken pride may stand between you and Edgar.'

And then, falteringly, ashamed of her own generosity, Madoline told her sister how she meant to divide her fortune.

'What!' cried Daphne, turning pale; 'take his money? Not a sixpence. Never speak of it—never think of such a thing again.'

'Whose money, dear? It is mine, and mine alone. I have the right to do what I like with it.'

'Would you dispose of it without asking Mr. Goring's leave—without consulting him?'

'Hardly, because I love him too well to take any step in life without asking his advice—without confiding fully in him. But he goes with me in this heart and soul, Daphne; he most thoroughly approves my plan.'

'You are very good—he is very generous—but I will never consent to accept sixpence out of your fortune. You may be as generous to me as you like—as you have always been, darling.

You may give me gloves and frocks and pocket-money, while you are Miss Lawford: but to rob you of your rights; to lessen your importance as Mrs. Goring; to feel myself under an obligation to your husband—not for all this wide world. Not if money could make me happy—which it could not,' she added with a stifled sob.

'Daphne, are you not happy?' questioned Lina, looking at her with sudden distress. 'My bright one, I thought your life here was all gladness and pleasure. You have seemed so happy with Edgar, so thoroughly at your ease with him, that I fancied you must be fond of him.'

'Should I be thoroughly at my ease with a man I loved, unless—unless our attachment were an old story—a settled business—like yours and Mr. Goring's?'

'Why will you persist in calling him Mr. Goring?'

'Oh, he is such a grand personage—the owner of an abbey, with cloisters, and half a mile of hot-houses—I could not bring myself to call him by his christian-name.'

'As if the abbey and the hot-houses made any difference! Well, darling, I am not going to worry you about poor Edgar. You must choose your own way of being happy. I would not for all the world that you should marry a man you did not love; but I should have been so glad if you could have loved Edgar. And I think, dear, that unintentionally—unconsciously even—you have done him a wrong. You have led him to believe you like him.'

'And so I do like him, better than anyone in the world—after my own flesh and blood.'

'Yes, dear. But he has been led to hope something more than that. I fear he will feel his disappointment keenly.'

'Nonsense, Lina. Don't you know that six months ago he was still suffering from his disappointment about you? and now you imagine he is going to break his heart for me. A heart so easily transferred cannot be easily broken. It is a portable article. No doubt he will carry it somewhere else.'

She kissed her sister and ran out of the room, leaving Madoline anxious and perplexed, yet not the less resolved to endow Daphne with half her wealth as soon as she came of age.

'Providence never intended that two sisters should be so unequally circumstanced,' she said to herself. 'Willy-nilly, Daphne must accept what I am determined to give her. The lawyers will find out a way.'

CHAPTER XVI.

'NO MAN MAY ALWAY HAVE PROSPERITEE.'

EDGAR TURCHILL did not go to the other end of the world to hide his grief and mortification at this second overthrow of his fondest hopes. He absented himself from South Hill for nearly a month, yet so contrived as that his absence should not appear the result of pride or anger. Mrs. Turchill's annual seaside holiday was as much an institution as the opening of Parliament, or the Derby: and she expected on all such occasions to be escorted and accompanied by her only son. She liked a fashionable watering-place, where there was a well-dressed crowd to be seen on parade or pier; she required to have her leisure enlivened by a good brass band; and she would accept nothing less in the way of lodgings than an airy bay-windowed drawing-room in the very best part of the sea front.

'If I am not to come to the sea-side comfortably I would rather stay at home,' she said to her confidante Deborah; an axiom which Deborah received as respectfully as if it had been Holy Writ.

'Of course, mum. Why should you come away from Hawks-yard to be cramped or moped?' said Deborah. 'You've all you can wish for there.'

Such murmurings as these had arisen when Edgar, sick to death of Brighton and Eastbourne, Scarborough and Torquay, had tempted his mother to visit some more romantic and less civilised shore; where the accommodation was of the rough-and-ready order, and where there was neither parade nor pier for the exhibition of fine clothes to the music of brazen bands. For picturesque scenery Mrs. Turchill cared not a jot. All wild and rugged coasts she denounced sweepingly, as dangerous to life and limb, and therefore to be avoided. The wildest bit of scenery she could tolerate was Beachy Head; and even that grassy height she deemed objectionable. Nor did she appreciate any watering-place which could not boast a smart array of shop-windows. She liked to be tempted by trumpery modern Dresden; or to have her love of colour gratified by the latest invention in bonnets and parasols. She liked a circulating library of the old-fashioned, Miss Burney type; where she could dawdle away an hour looking at new books and papers, soothed by the sympathetic strains of a musical-box. She liked to have her son well-dressed and in a top-hat, in attendance upon her during her afternoon drive in the local fly, along a smooth chalky high-road leading to nowhere in particular. She liked to attend local concerts, or to hear Miss Snevillici, the renowned Shakespearian elocutionist, read the Trial Scene in the 'Merchant of Venice,' followed by Tennyson's 'Queen of the May.'

To poor Edgar this sea-side holiday seemed always a foretaste of purgatory. It was ever so much worse than the fortnight's hard labour in London, for in the big city there were sights worth seeing; while here, at the stereotyped watering-place, life was one dismal round of genteel inactivity.

But this year Edgar was seized with a sudden desire to hasten the annual expedition.

'Mother, I think this lovely weather must break up before long,' he said briskly, with a laborious affectation of cheerfulness, as he sat at dinner with his parent on the day after Daphne's cruelty. 'What should you say to our starting for the sea-side to-morrow?'

'To-morrow! My dear Edgar, that would be quite impossible. I shall want a week for packing.'

'A week! Surely Deborah could put your things into a portmanteau in six hours as easily as in six days.'

'You don't know what you are talking about, my dear. A lady's wardrobe is so different from a man's. All my gowns will want looking over carefully before they are packed. And I must have Miss Piper over from Warwick to do some alterations for me. The fashions change so quickly nowadays. And some of my laces will have to be washed. And I am not sure that I shall not have to drive over to Leamington and order a bonnet. I should not like to disgrace you by appearing on the parade with a dowdy bonnet.'

Edgar sighed. He would have liked to go to some wild Welsh or Scottish coast, far from beaten tracks. He would have liked some sea-side village in the south of Ireland—Dunmore, or Tramore, or Kilkee: some quiet retreat nestled in a hollow of the cliffs, where as yet never brass band nor fashionable gowns had come: a place to which people came for pure love of fine air and grand scenery, and not to show off their clothes or advertise their easy circumstances. But he knew that if he took his mother to such a place she would be miserable; so he held his peace.

'Where would you like to go this year?' he said presently.

'Well, I have been considering that point, Edgar. Let me see now. We went to Brighton last year——'

'Yes,' sighed Edgar, remembering what a tread-mill business the lawn had seemed to him; how ineffably tiresome the Aquarium; how monotonous the shops in the King's Road, and the entertainments at the Pavilion.

'And to Scarborough the year before.'

'Yes,' with a still wearier sigh.

'And the year before that to Eastbourne; and the year before that to Torquay. Don't you think we might go to Torquay again this year? I hear it is very much improved.'

'Very much built upon, I suppose you mean, mother. More

smoky chimneys, more hotels, more churches, longer streets. I should think, judging by what it had come to when we saw it, that by this time Torquay must be a very good imitation of Bayswater. However, if you like Torquay——'

'It is one of the few places I do like.'

'Then let it be Torquay, by all means. I'll tell you what I'll do, mother. I'll run down to Torquay to-morrow, find some nice lodgings for you—I think by this time I know exactly what you want in that way—and engage them for any day you like to name.'

'That's very kind of you, Edgar. But be sure you get some reference as to the landlady's character, so that you may be certain there has been no fever case in the house during the last twelvemonth. And it would be as well to get a local architect to look at the drains. It would be a guinea well spent.'

'All right, mother; I'll do anything you like. I am longing for a blow of sea-air.'

'But it will be at least a week before I can come. What will you do with yourself in the meantime?'

'Oh, I shall contrive to amuse myself somehow. I might go on to Dartmouth, and charter a boat, and go up the Dart. I want very much to see the Dart. Only say on what day I may expect you at Torquay.'

'Am I to travel alone, Edgar?'

'You'll have Deborah. And the journey won't be difficult. You'll join the express at Swindon, don't you know——'

'If you think I can trust to Deborah's care of the luggage,' said Mrs. Turchill dubiously. 'She's very steady.'

'Steady! Well she ought to be at her age. You've only to get the luggage labelled, you see, mother——'

'I never trust to that,' answered the matron solemnly. 'I like Deborah to get out at every station where the train stops, and see with her own eyes that my luggage is in the van. Railway people are so stupid.

Edgar did not envy Deborah. Having thus adroitly planned an immediate departure he was off soon after daybreak next morning, and arrived at Torquay in time for dinner. He perambulated the loneliest places he could find all the evening, brooding over his disappointment, and wondering if there were any foundation for Gerald Goring's idea that Daphne was to be won by him even yet. He slept at The Imperial, and devoted the next morning to lodging-hunting; till his soul sickened at the very sight of the inevitable housemaid, who can't answer the most general inquiry—not so far as to say how many bedrooms there are in the house, without reference to the higher powers—and the inevitable landlady, who cannot make up her mind about the rent till she has asked how many there are in family, and whether late dinners will be required. Before sundown, how-

ever, after ascending innumerable flights of stairs, and looking into a dismal series of newly-furnished rooms, he found a suite of apartments which he believed would satisfy his mother and Deborah: and having engaged the same for a period of three weeks, he went down to the water's edge, to a spot where boating men most did congregate, and there negotiated the hire of a rakish little yawl, just big enough to be safe in a summer sea. In this light craft he was to sail at six o'clock next morning with a man and a boy.

'How Daphne would enjoy knocking about this lovely coast in just such a boat!' he thought. 'If she were my wife, I would buy her as pretty a yacht as any lady could desire, and she and I would sail half round the world together. She must be tired of the Avon, poor child.'

Daphne was very tired of the Avon. Never had the days of her life seemed longer or drearier than they seemed to her just now, when her faithful slave Edgar was no longer at hand to minister to her caprices. A strange stillness seemed to have fallen upon South Hill. Sir Vernon was laid up with that suppressed gout which Daphne fancied was only another name for unsuppressed ill-temper, so closely did the two complaints seem allied. At such times Madoline was more than ever necessary to his well-being. She sat with him in the library; she read to him; she wrote his letters; and was in all things verily his right hand. The most pure and perfect filial love sweetened an office which would have seemed hard to an ungrateful or cold-hearted daughter. Yet in the close retirement of the stern-looking business-like chamber, with its prim bookshelves and standard literature—not a book which every decently-read student does not know from cover to cover—she could but remember the bright summer days that were done; the aimless wanderings in meadow and wood; the drives to Goring Abbey; the tea-drinkings in the cloisters or in the gardens; the happy season which was gone. The knowledge that this one happy summer, the first she and Gerald had ever spent together as engaged lovers, was ended and over, made her feel as if some part of her own youth had gone with it—something which could never come again. It had been such an utterly happy period; such peerless weather; such a fair gladsome earth, teeming with all good things—even the farmers ceasing to grumble, and owning that, for once in a way, there was hope of a prosperous harvest. And now it was over; the corn was reaped, and sportsmen were tramping over the stubble; the plough-horses were creeping slowly across the hill; the sun was beginning to decline soon after five-o'clock tea; breathings of approaching winter sharpened the sweet morning breezes; autumnal mists veiled the meadows at eventide.

Gerald Goring had gone to Scotland to shoot grouse. It

seemed to Daphne, prowling about gardens and meadows with Goldie in a purposeless manner that was the essence of idleness, as if the summer had gone in a breath. Yesterday she was here, that glorious, radiant, disembodied goddess we call Summer—yesterday she was here, and all the lanes were sweetened with lime-blossoms, and the roses were being wasted with prodigal profusion, and the river ran liquid gold; and to sit on a sunny bank was to be steeped in warm delight. To-day there were only stiff-looking dahlias, and variegated foliage, and mouse-coloured plants, and house-leek borders, in the gardens where the roses had been; and to sit on a grassy bank was to shiver or to sneeze. The river had a dismal look. There had been heavy rains within the last few days, and the willowy banks were hidden under dull mud-coloured water. There was no more pleasure in boating.

'You may oil her, or varnish her, or do anything that is proper to be done with her before you put her away for the winter, Bink,' Daphne said to her faithful attendant; 'I shan't row any more this year.'

'Lor, miss, we may have plenty more fine days yet.'

'I don't care for that. I am tired of rowing. Perhaps I may never row again.'

She went into luncheon yawning, and looking much more tired than Madoline, who had been writing letters for her father all the morning.

'I wish I were a hunting young woman, Lina,' she said.

'Why, dear?'

'Because I should have something to look forward to in the winter.'

'If you could only employ yourself more indoors, Daphne.'

'Do I not employ myself indoors? Why, I play billiards for hours at a stretch when I have anyone to play with. I practised out-of-the-way strokes for an hour and a half this morning.'

'I am sure, dear, you would be happier if you had some more feminine amusements; if you were to go on with your water-colour painting, for instance. Gerald could give you a little instruction when he is here. He paints beautifully. I'm sure he would be pleased to help you.'

'No, dear; I have no talent. I like beginning a sketch; but directly it begins to look horrid I lose patience; and then I begin to lay on colour in a desperate way, till the whole thing is the most execrable daub imaginable; and then I get into a rage and tear it into a thousand bits. It's just the same with my needlework; there always comes a time when I get my thread entangled, and begin to pucker, and the whole business goes wrong. I have no patience. I shall never finish anything. I shall never achieve anything. I am an absolute failure.'

'Daphne, if you only knew how it pains me to hear you talk of yourself like that——'

'Then I won't do it again. I would not pain you for the wealth of this world—not even to have it always summer, instead of a dull, abominable, shivery season like this.'

'Gerald says it is lovely in Argyleshire; balmy and warm; almost too hot for walking over the hills.'

'He is enjoying himself, I suppose,' said Daphne coldly.

'Yes; he is having capital sport.'

'Shooting those birds that make our dining-room smell so nasty every evening, and helping to stock Aunt Rhoda's larder.'

'He does not intend to stay after the end of this month. He will be home early in October.'

Daphne did not even affect to be interested. She was feeding Goldie, who was allowed to come in to luncheon when Sir Vernon was not in the way.

'I had a letter from Mrs. Turchill this morning,' said Lina; 'she is enjoying herself immensely at Torquay. Edgar is very attentive and devoted to her, going everywhere with her. He is a most affectionate son.'

'And a good son makes a good husband, doesn't he, Lina? Is that idea at the bottom of your mind when you talk of his goodness to his very commonplace mother?'

'I don't want to talk of him, Daphne, to any one who values him so little as you do.'

'But I value him very much—almost as much as I do Goldie—but not quite, not quite, my pet,' she added reassuringly to the dog, lest he should be jealous. 'I have missed him horribly; no one to tease; no one to talk nonsense with. You are so sensible that I could not afford to shock you by my absurdities; and Mr. Goring is so cynical that I fancy he is always laughing. I miss Edgar every hour of the day.'

'And yet——'

'And yet I don't care one little straw for him—in the kind of way you care for Mr. Goring,' said Daphne, with a sudden blush.

Lina sighed and was silent. She had not abandoned all hope that Daphne would in time grow more warmly attached to the faithful swain, whose society she evidently missed sorely in these dull autumnal days, during which the only possible excitement was a box of new books from Mudie's.

'More "Voyages to the North Pole"; more "Three Weeks on the Top of the Biggest Pyramid"; more "Memoirs of Philip of Macedon's Private Secretary,"' cried Daphne, sitting on the ground beside the newly-arrived box, and tossing all the instructive books on the carpet, after a contemptuous glance at their titles. 'Here is Browning's new poem, thank goodness! and a novel, "My Only Jo." Told in the first person and pre-

sent tense, no doubt; nice and light and lively. I think I'll take that and Browning, if you don't mind, Lina; and you shall have all the Travels and Memoirs.'

With the help of novels and poetry, and long rambles even in the wild showery weather, waterproofed and booted against the storm, and wearing a neat little felt wide-awake which weather could not spoil, Daphne contrived to get through her life somehow while her faithful slave was away. Was it indeed he whom she missed so sorely? Was it his footfall which her ear knew so well; his step which quickened the beating of her heart, and brought the warm blood to her cheek? Was it his coming and going which so deeply stirred the current of her life? Life had been empty of delight for the last three weeks; but was it Edgar's absence made the little world of South Hill so blank and dreary? In her heart of hearts Daphne knew too well that it was not. Yet Edgar had made an important element in her life. He had helped her, if not to forget, at least to banish thought. He had sympathised with all her frivolous pleasures, and made it easier for her to take life lightly.

'If I were once to be serious I should break my heart,' she said to herself, as she sat curled up on the fluffy white rug by one of the morning-room windows, her thoughts straying off from 'My Only Jo,' which was the most frothy of fashionable novels.

Mrs. Turchill was so delighted with Torquay, in its increased towniness and shoppiness, its interesting Ritualistic services, at which it was agreeable to assist once in a way, however a well-regulated mind might disapprove all such Papistical innovations, that October had begun before she and her son returned to Hawksyard. Edgar had been glad to stay away. He shrank with a strange shyness from meeting Daphne; albeit he was always longing for her as the hart for water-brooks. He amused himself knocking about in his little yawl-rigged yacht, thinking of the girl he loved. Mrs. Turchill complained that he had grown selfish and inattentive. He rarely walked with her on the parade; he refused to listen to the town band; he went reluctantly to hear Miss Snevillici; and slumbered in his too-conspicuous front seat while that lady declaimed the Balcony Scene from 'Romeo and Juliet.'

'If it were not for Deborah I should feel horribly lonely,' complained Mrs. Turchill. 'And it is not right that I should be dependent upon a servant for society.'

Gerald had not yet returned. He had gone on a yachting expedition with an old college chum. He was enjoying the wild free life, and his letters to Madoline were full of fun and high spirits.

'Next year we shall be here together, perhaps,' he wrote. 'I think you would like the fun. It would be so new to you

after the placid pleasures of South Hill. And what a yacht we would have! This I am now upon is a mere cockle-shell to the ship I would build for my dear love. There should be room enough for you and all your pets—Fluff and the squirrel, your books, your piano, and for Daphne, too, if she would like to come; only she is such a wild young person that I should live in constant fear of her falling overboard.'

Madoline read this passage to Daphne laughingly. 'You see that he remembers you, dear. The thought of you enters into his plans for the future.'

'He is very kind: I am much obliged to him,' Daphne answered icily.

It was not the first time she had responded coldly to Madoline's mention of her lover. Her sister felt the slight against her idol, and was deeply wounded.

'Daphne,' she said in a voice that was faintly tremulous in spite of her effort to be calm, 'you have said many little things lately—or perhaps it is hardly what you have said, but only your looks and tones—which make me think that you dislike Gerald.'

'Dislike him! No, that is impossible. He has all the attributes which make people admired and liked.'

'Yet I don't think you like him.'

'It is not in my nature to like many people. I like Edgar. I love you, with all my heart and soul. Be content with that, darling,' said Daphne, kneeling by Madoline's side, resting the bright head, with its soft silken hair, on her shoulder—the face looking downward and half hidden.

'No; I cannot be content. I made up my mind that Gerald was to be as dear to you as a brother—as dear as the brother you lost might have been, had God spared him and made him all we could wish. And now you set up some barrier of false pride against him.'

'I don't know about false pride. I can hardly be very fond of a man who ridicules me, and treats me like a child, or a plaything. Affection will scarcely thrive in an atmosphere of contempt.'

'Contempt! Why, Daphne, what can have put such an idea into your head? Gerald likes and admires you. If you knew how he praises your beauty, your fascinating ways! You would not have him praise you to your face, would you? My pet, I should be sorry to see you spoiled by adulation.'

'Do you suppose I want praise or flattery?' cried Daphne angrily. 'I want to be respected. I want to be treated like a woman, not a child. I—— Forgive me, Lina dearest. I daresay I am disagreeable and ill-tempered.'

'Only believe the truth, dear. Gerald has no thought of you that is not tender and flattering. If he teases you a little

now and then it is only as a brother might tease you. He wishes you to think of him in every way as a brother. It always wounds me when you call him Mr. Goring.'

'I shall never call him anything else,' said Daphne sullenly.

'And if you do not marry as soon as I do——'

'I shall never marry——'

'Dearest, forgive me for not believing that. If you are not married next year you will have a second home at the Abbey. Gerald and I have chosen the rooms we intend for you; the dearest little boudoir over the porch, with an oriel window, just such a room as will delight you.'

'You are all that is good: but I don't suppose I shall be able often to take advantage of your kindness. When you are married it will be my duty to dance attendance upon papa, and to try and make him like me. I don't suppose I shall ever succeed, but I mean to make the effort, however unpleasant it may be to both of us.'

'My sweet one, you are sure to win his love. Who could help loving you?'

'My father has helped it all this time,' answered Daphne, still moody and with downcast eyes.

Edgar and his mother stayed away till the third week in September. When they came back to Hawksyard cub-hunting was in full swing, and Mr. Turchill rose at five o'clock three mornings a week to ride to the kennels. He rode with two sets of hounds, making nothing of distance. He bought himself a fifth hunter—having four good ones already—which was naturally supposed to overtop all the rest in strength, pace, and beauty. His mother began to fear that the stables would be her son's ruin.

'Three thousand a-year was considered a large income when your father and I were married,' she said; 'but it is a mere pittance now for a country gentleman in your position. We ought to be careful, Edgar.'

'Who said we were going to be careless, mother mine? I am sure you are a model among housewives,' said Edgar lightly.

'You've taken on a new man in the stable, I hear, Edgar—to attend to your new horse, I suppose.'

'Only a new boy at fourteen bob a week, mother. We were rather short-handed.'

'Short-handed! With four men!'

Edgar could not stop to debate the matter. It was nine o'clock, and he was eating a hurried breakfast before starting on his useful covert hack for Snitterfield, where the hounds were to meet. It was to be the first meet of the season, an occasion for some excitement. Pleasant to see all the old company, with a new face or two perhaps among them, and a

sprinkling of new horses—young ones whose education had only just begun. Edgar was going to exhibit his new mare, an almost thorough-bred black, and was all aglow with pride at the thought of the admiration she would receive. He looked his best in his well-worn red coat, new buckskins, and mahogany tops.

'I hope you'll be careful, Edgar,' said his mother, hanging about him in the hall, 'and that you won't go taking desperate jumps with that new mare. She has a nasty vicious look in her hind legs; and yesterday, when I opened the stable-door to speak to Baker, she put back her ears.'

'A horse may do that without being an absolute fiend, mother. Black Pearl is the kindest creature in Christendom. Good-bye.'

'Dinner at eight, I suppose,' sighed Mrs. Turchill, who preferred an earlier hour.

'Yes, if you don't mind. It gives me plenty of time for a bath. Ta, ta.'

He had swung himself on to the thick-set chestnut roadster, and was trotting merrily away on the other side of the drawbridge, before his mother had finished her regretful sigh. The groom had gone on before with Black Pearl. These hunting mornings were the only occasions on which Mr. Turchill forgot his disappointment. The keen delight of fresh air, a fast run, pleasant company, familiar voices, brushed away all dark thoughts. For the moment he lived only to fly across the level fields in a country which seemed altogether changed from the scene of his daily walks and rides; all familiar things—hedges, hills, commons, brooks—taking a look of newness, as if he were galloping through a newly-invented world. For the moment he lived as the bird lives—a thing of life and motion, a creature too swift for thought or pain or care. Then, after the day's hard riding, came the lazy homeward walk side by side with a friend, and friendly talk about horses and dogs and neighbours. Then a dinner for which even a lover's appetite showed no sign of decay. Then pleasant exhaustion; a cigar; a nap; and a long night of dreamless rest.

No doubt it was this relief afforded by the hunting season which saved Mr. Turchill from exhibiting himself in the dejected condition which Rosalind declared to be an essential mark of a lover. No lean cheek or sunken eye, neglected beard or sullen spirit, marked Edgar when he came to South Hill. He seemed so much at his ease, and had so much to tell about that first meet at Smutterfield, and the delightful run which followed it, that Daphne was confirmed in her idea that in affairs of the heart Mr. Turchill belonged to the weathercock species.

'If he could get over your rejection of him, you may suppose how easily he would get over mine,' she said to her sister.

Yet she was very glad to have Edgar back again: to be able to order him about, to beat him at billiards, or waltz with him in the dusky hall between five-o'clock tea and the dressing-bell, while Lina played for them in the morning-room. In this one accomplishment Daphne was teacher, and a most imperious mistress.

'If you expect me to be seen dancing with you at the Hunt Ball, you must improve vastly between this and January,' she said.

CHAPTER XVII.

'AND IN MY HERTE WONDREN I BEGAN.'

For a man to waltz in the gloaming with a girl whom he passionately loves, and who has contemptuously rejected him, is a kind of pleasure too near the edge of pain to be altogether blissful. Yet Edgar came every non-hunting day to South Hill, and was always ready to dance to Daphne's piping. He was her first partner since the little crabbed old French master at Asnières, who had taken a few turns with her now and then, fiddling all the time, in order to show his other pupils what dancing meant. He declared that Daphne was the only one of them all who had the soul of a dancer.

'*Elle est née sylphide.* She moves in harmony with the music; she is a part of the melody,' he said, as he scraped away at the languishing Duc de Reichstadt valse, the tune to which our grandmothers used to revolve in the days when the newly imported waltz was denounced as an iniquity.

The grand Hunt Ball, which took place only once in two years at Stratford Town Hall, was to be held in the coming January, and Sir Vernon had consented that Daphne should appear at this festivity, chaperoned by her aunt and accompanied by her elder sister. It was an assembly so thoroughly local that Mrs. Ferrers felt it a solemn duty to be present: even her parochial character, which to the narrow-minded might seem incongruous, made it, she asserted, all the more incumbent upon her to be there.

'A clergyman's wife ought to show her interest in all innocent amusements,' she said. 'If there were any fear of doubtful people getting admitted, of course I would sooner cut off my feet than cross the threshold; but where the voucher system is so thoroughly carried out——'

'There are sure to be plenty of pretty girls,' said the Rector, 'and I believe there's a capital card-room. I've a good mind to go with you.'

'If it were in summer, Duke, I should urge it on you as a duty; but in this severe weather the change from a hot room——'

'Might bring on my bronchitis. I think you're right, Rhoda. And the champagne at these places is generally a doubtful brand, while of all earthly delusions and snares a ball-supper is the most hollow. But I should like to have seen Daphne at her first ball. I am very fond of little Daphne.'

'I am always pleased for you to be interested in my relations,' replied Mrs. Ferrers, with a sour look; 'but I must say, of all the young people I ever had anything to do with, Daphne is the most unsatisfactory.'

'In what way?' asked Mr. Ferrers, looking lazily up from his tea-cup.

It was afternoon tea-time, and the husband and wife were sitting *tête-à-tête* before the fire in the Rector's snug study, where the old black oak shelves were full of the most delightful books, which he was proud to possess but rarely looked at—inside. The outsides, beautiful in tawny and crimson leather, tooled and gilded and labelled and lettered, regaled his eye in many a lazy reverie, when he reposed in his arm-chair, and watched the firelight winking and blinking at those treasuries of wit and wisdom.

'In what way is Daphne troublesome, my dear?' repeated the Rector. 'I am interested in the puss. I taught her her Catechism.'

'I wish you had taught her the spirit as well as the letter,' retorted Mrs. Ferrers tartly. 'The girl is an absolute pagan. After flirting with Edgar Turchill in a manner that would have endangered her reputation had she belonged to people of inferior position, she has the supreme folly to refuse him.'

'What you call folly may be her idea of wisdom,' answered the Rector. 'She may do better than Turchill—a young man of excellent family, but with very humdrum surroundings, and a frightful dead-weight in that mother, who I believe has a life-interest in the estate which would prevent his striking out in any way till she is under the turf. Such a girl as Daphne should do better than Edgar Turchill. She is wise to wait for her chances.'

'How worldly you are, Marmaduke! It shocks me to hear such sentiments from a minister of the gospel.'

'My dear, he who was in every attribute a model for ministers of the gospel boasted that he was all things to all men. When I discuss worldly matters I talk as a man of the world. I think Daphne ought to make a brilliant marriage. She has the finest eyes I have seen for a long time—always excepting those which illuminate my own fireside,' he added, smiling benignly on his wife.

'Oh, pray make no exception,' she answered snappishly. 'I never pretended to be a beauty; though my features are certainly more regular than Daphne's. I am a genuine Lawford,

and the Lawfords have had straight noses from time immemorial. Daphne takes after her unhappy mother.'

'Ah, poor thing!' sighed the Rector. 'She was a lovely young creature when Lawford brought her home.'

'Daphne resembles her to a most unfortunate degree,' said Aunt Rhoda.

'A sad story,' sighed the Rector; 'a sad story.'

'I think it would better become us to forget it,' said his wife.

'My love, it was you who spoke of poor Lady Lawford.'

'Marmaduke, I am disgusted at the tone you take about her. Poor Lady Lawford indeed! I consider her quite the most execrable woman I ever heard of.'

'She was beautiful; men told her so, and she believed them. She was tempted; and she was weak. Execrable is a hard word, Rhoda. She never injured you.'

'She blighted my brother's life. Do you suppose I can easily forgive that? You men are always ready to make excuses for a pretty woman. I heard of Colonel Kirkbank, the other day. Lady Hetheridge met him at Baden—a wreck. They say he is immensely rich. He has never married, it seems.'

'That at least is a grace in him. "His honour rooted in dishonour stood; and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."'

'You are in a sentimental mood this evening, Marmaduke,' sneered Rhoda. 'One would suppose that you had been in love with my brother's second wife.'

'She has been so long in her grave that I don't think you and I need quarrel if I confess that I admired her. There is a look in Daphne's face now she has grown up that recalls her mother almost painfully. I hope Todd won't burn that pheasant, Rhoda. I'm afraid she is getting a little careless. The last was as dry as a stick.'

Scotland made up for a chilly and inferior summer by an altogether superior autumn. The days were ever so much fairer and longer on that wild north coast than they were in Warwickshire; and tempted by the beauty of sky and sea, backed by the urgent desire of his bachelor friend, the skipper of the smart schooner-rigged yacht *Kelpie*, Gerald Goring stayed much longer than he had intended to stay; atoning, so far as he could atone, for his prolonged absence, by writing his betrothed the most delightful letters, and sending a weekly packet of sepia sketches, which reflected every phase of sea and sky, rock and hill. To describe these things with his brush was as easy to Gerald as it is to other men to describe with their pens.

'It is an idle dreamy life,' he wrote. 'When I am not shooting land-fowl on the hills, or water-fowl from my dingey, I sit on the deck and sketch, till I grow almost into a sea-

vegetable—a zoophyte which contracts and expands with a faintly pleasurable sensation—and calls that life. I read no end of poetry—Byron, Shelley, Keats—and that book whose wisdom and whose beauty no amount of reading can ever dry up—Goethe's "Faust." I want no new books—the old ones are inexhaustible. Curiosity may tempt me to look at a new writer; but in an age of literary mediocrity I go back for choice to the Titans of the past. Do you think I am scornful of your favourites, Tennyson and Browning? No, love. They, too, are Titans; but we shall value them more when they have received the divine honours that can only come after death.

'I am longing to be with you, and yet I feel that I am doing myself a world of good in this rough open-air life. I was getting a little moped at the Abbey. The place is so big, and so dreary, like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty—waiting to wake into life and brightness at the coming of love and you. The lonely rooms are haunted by my dear mother's image, and by the sense of my loss. When you come I shall be so happy in the present that the pain of past sorrow will be softened.

'I sit sketching these romantic caves—where we earn our dinner by shooting the innocent rock-pigeons—and thinking of you, and of my delight in showing you this coast next autumn.

'Yes, love, we will have a yacht. I know you are fond of the sea. Your sister is a fanatic in her love of the water. How she will delight in these islands!'

He thought of Daphne sometimes, as he sat in the bow of the boat, lulled almost to slumber by the rise and fall of the waves gently lapping the hull. His brush fell idle across the little tin colour-box, and he gave himself up to listless reverie. How Daphne would love this free unfettered life: a life in which there were no formalities; no sitting prim and straight at an orderly dinner-table; no conventional sequence of every-day ceremonies in a hideous monotony. It was a roving gipsy life which must needs please that erratic soul.

'Poor little Daphne! It is strange that she and I don't get on better,' he said to himself. 'We were such capital friends at Fontainebleau. Perhaps the recollection of that day is in some way disagreeable to her. She has been very stand-offish to me ever since—except by fits and starts. There are times when she forgets to be formal; and then she is charming.'

Yes; there had been times—times when all that was picturesque and poetical in her nature asserted itself, and when her future brother-in-law succumbed to the spell, and admired her just a little more warmly than he felt to be altogether well for his peace, or perchance for hers.

Perhaps he, too, had been somewhat formal—had fenced himself round with forms and ceremonies—lest some lurking sentiment which he had never dared to analyse, or even to think

about, should grow stronger. He wanted to be honest; he wanted to be true and loyal. But the lovely young face, so piquant, so entrancing in its exquisite girlishness, came across his fancies too often for perfect repose of conscience. The memory of those two summer days at Fontainebleau—idle, foolish, unconsidered hours—was an ever-present part of his mind. It was so small a thing; yet it haunted him. How much better it would have been, he thought, if Daphne had been more candid, had allowed him to speak freely of that innocent adventure! Concealment gave it a flavour of guilt. A hundred times he had been on the point of letting out the secret by this or that allusion, when Daphne's blush and the quiver of Daphne's lip had startled him into caution. This made a secret understanding between them in spite of his own desire to be honest; and it worried him to think that there should be any such hidden bond.

Madoline was the love of his life, the hope and glory of his days. He had no doubt as to his feelings about her. From his boyhood he had admired, revered, and loved her. He was only three years her senior, and in their early youth the delicately-nurtured, carefully-educated girl, reared among grown-up people, and far in advance of her years, had seemed in all intellectual things the boy's superior. Lady Geraldine was idle and self-indulgent; she petted and spoiled her son, but she taught him nothing. Had he not a private tutor—a young clergyman who preferred the luxurious leisure of the Abbey to the hard work of a curacy—and was not his education sufficiently provided for when this well-recommended young Oxonian had been engaged at a munificent salary? The young Oxonian was as fond of shooting, billiards, cricket, and boating as his pupil; so the greater part of Gerald's early youth was devoted to these accomplishments; and it was only the boy's natural aptitude for learning whatever he wished to learn which saved him from being a dunce. At fifteen he was transferred to Eton, where he found better cricketing and a better river than in Warwickshire.

From Lady Geraldine the boy had received no bent towards high thoughts or a noble ambition. She loved him passionately, but with a love that was both weak and selfish. She would have had him educated at home, a boudoir sybarite, to lie on the Persian rug at her feet and read frivolous books in fine bindings; to sit by her side when she drove; to be pampered and idolised and ruined in body and soul. The father's strong sense interfered to prevent this. Mr. Giles-Goring was no classic, and he was a self-taught mathematician, while the boy's tutor had taken honours in both branches of learning; but he was clever enough to see that this luxurious home-education was a mockery, that the lad was being flattered by an obsequious

tutor, and spoiled by a foolish mother. He sent the Oxonian about his business, and took the boy to Eton, not before Lady Geraldine had done him as much harm as a doting mother can do to a beloved son. She had taught him, unintentionally and unconsciously, perhaps, to despise his father. She had taught him to consider himself, by right of his likeness to her and his keen sympathy with all her thoughts and fancies and prejudices —a sympathy to which she had, as unconsciously, trained and schooled him—belonging to her class and not to his father's. The low-born father was an accident in his life—a good endurable man, and to be respected (after a fashion) for his lowly worth, but spiritually, eclectically, æsthetically, of no kin with the son who bore his name, and who was to inherit, and perhaps waste, his hard-won wealth.

The mother and son had a code of signals, little looks and subtle smiles, with which they communicated their ideas before the blunt plain-spoken father. Lady Geraldine never spoke against her husband: nor did she descend even in moments of confidence to vulgar ridicule. 'So like your father,' she would say, with her languid smile, of any honest unconventional act or speech of Mr. Giles-Goring's; and it must be confessed that Mr. Giles-Goring was one of those impulsive outspoken men who do somewhat exercise a wife's patience. Lady Geraldine never lost her temper with him; she was never rude; she never overtly thwarted his wishes, or opposed his plans; but she shrugged her graceful shoulders, and lifted her delicately-pencilled eyebrows, and allowed her son to understand what an impassable gulf yawned between her, the daughter of a hundred earls—or at least half-a-dozen—and the self-made millionaire.

Escaping from the stifling moral atmosphere of his mother's boudoir, Gerald found his first ideas of a higher and a nobler life at South Hill. At the Abbey he had been taught to believe that there were two good things in the world, rank and money; but that even rank, the very flower of life, must droop and fade if not manured with gold. At South Hill he learned to think lightly of both, and to aspire to something better than either. For the sake of being praised and admired by Madoline he worked, almost honestly, at Eton and Oxford. She kindled his ambition, and, inspired by her, his youth and talent blossomed into poetry. He sat up late at nights writing impassioned verse. He dashed off wild stanzas in the 'To Thyrza' style, when his brain was fired by the mild orgies of a modern wine, and the fiercer rapture of a modern bear-fight. And Madoline was his only Thyrza. He was not a man who can find his Egeria in every street. For a little while he fancied that it was in him to be a second Byron; that the divine breath inflated his lungs; that he had but to strike on the cithara for the divine accords

to come. He strummed cleverly enough upon the sacred strings, spoiled a good deal of clean paper, and amused himself considerably. Then, failing—in consequence of an utter absence of the critical faculty—to win the prize for English verse, he turned his back upon the Muses, and henceforward spoke with ridicule of his poetic adolescence. Still the Muse had exercised her elevating influence; and, inspired by her and by Madoline, Gerald Goring had learned to despise those lesser aims which his mother had held before him as the sublimities of life.

He was fond of art, and had a marked talent for painting; but as he never extended his labours or his studies beyond the amateur's easy course, he was not likely to rise above the amateur's level. Why should a man who is sure to inherit a million submit to the drudgery of severe technical training in order to take the bread out of the mouths of painters who must needs live by their art? Gerald painted a little, now landscape, now figure, as the spirit moved him; sculptured a little; poetised a little; set a little song of his own to music now and then to please Lina; and was altogether accomplished and interesting. But he would have liked to be great, to have had his name bandied about for praise or blame upon the lips of men; and it irked him somewhat to know and feel that he was not of the stuff which makes great men; or, in other words, that he entirely lacked that power of sustained industry which can alone achieve greatness. For his own inward satisfaction, and for Lina's sake, he would have liked to distinguish himself. But the pathway of life had been made fatally smooth for him; it lay through a land of flowery pastures and running brooks, a happy valley of all earthly delights; and how could any man be resolute enough to turn aside from all sensuous pleasures to climb rugged rocky hills in pursuit of some perchance unattainable spiritual delight? There was so much that wealth could give him, that it would have been hardly natural for Gerald Goring to live laborious days for the sake of the one thing which wealth could not give. He had just that dreamy poetic temperament which can clothe sensual joys with the glory and radiance of the intellectual. Politics, statecraft, he frankly detested; science he considered an insult to poetry. He would have liked the stir and excitement, the fever and glory of war; but not the daily dry-as-dust work of a soldier's life, or the hardships of campaigning. He was not an unbeliever, but his religious belief was too vague for a Churchman. Having failed to distinguish himself as a poet, and being too idle to succeed as a painter, he saw no royal road to fame open to him; and so was content to fall back from the race, and enjoy the delicious repose of an utterly aimless life. He pictured to himself a future in which there should be no crumpled rose-leaf; a wife in all things perfect, fondly loved, admired, respected; children as lovely as a poet's dream

of childhood ; an existence passed amidst the fairest scenes of earth, with such endless variety of background as unlimited wealth can give. He would not, like Tiberius, build himself a dozen villas upon one rock-bound island ; but he would make his temporary nest in every valley and by every lake, striking his tents before ever satiety could dull the keen edge of enjoyment.

Nor should this ideal life, though aimless, be empty of good works. Madoline should have *carte blanche* for the gratification of her benevolent schemes, great or small, and he would be ready to help her with counsel and sympathy ; provided always that he were not called upon to work, or to put himself *en rapport* with professional philanthropists—a most useful class, no doubt, but obnoxious to him as a lover of ease and pleasure.

He had looked forward with placid self-satisfaction to this life ever since his engagement—and indeed for some time before that solemn betrothal. From his boyhood he had loved Madoline, and had believed himself beloved by her. Betrothal followed almost as a matter of course. Lady Geraldine had spoken of the engagement as a settled thing, ever so long before the lovers had bound themselves each to each. She had told Lina that she was to be her daughter, the only girl she could love as her son's wife ; and when Gerald was away at Oxford, Lina had spent half her life at Goring with his mother, talking about him, worshipping him, as men are worshipped sometimes by women infinitely above them.

From the time of his engagement—nay, from the time when first his boyish heart recognised a mistress—Gerald's affection for Madoline had known no change or diminution. Never had his soul wavered. Nor did it waver in his regard and reverence for her now, as he sat on the sunlit deck of the *Kelpie* in this fair autumn weather, his brush lying idle by his side, his thoughts perplexed and wandering. Yet there was a jar in the harmony of his life ; a dissonant interval somewhere in the music. The thought of Daphne troubled him. He had a suspicion that she was not happy. Gay and sparkling as she was at times, she was prone to fits of silence and sullenness unaccountable in so young a creature : unless it were that she cherished some secret grief, and that the hidden fox so many of us carry had his tooth in her young breast.

He was no coxcomb, not in the least degree inclined to suppose that women had a natural bent towards falling in love with him : yet in this case he was troubled by the suspicion that Daphne's stand-offishness was not so much a token of indifference or dislike, as the sign of a deeper feeling. She had been so variable in her manner to him. Now all sweet, and anon all sour ; now avoiding him, now showing but too plainly her intense delight in his presence—by subtlest signs ; by sudden

blushes; by loveliest looks; by faintly quivering lip or trembling hand; by the swift lighting up of her whole face at his coming; by the low veiled tones of her soft sweet voice. Yes; by too many a sign and token—fighting her hardest to hide her secret all the time—she had given him ground for suspecting that she loved him.

He recalled, with unspeakable pain, her pale distressed face that day of their first meeting at South Hill; the absolute horror in her widely-opened eyes; the deadly coldness of her trembling hand. Why had she called her boat by that ridiculous name: and why had she been so anxious to cancel it? The thought of those things disturbed his peace. She was so lovely, so innocent, so wild, so wilful.

'My bright spirit of the woods,' he said to himself, 'I should like your fate to be happy. And yet—and yet—'

He dared not shape his thought further, but the question was in his mind: 'Would I like her fate to be far apart from mine?'

Why had she rejected Edgar Turchill, a man so honestly, so obviously devoted to her?—able, one might suppose, to sympathise with all her girlish fancies, to gratify every whim.

'She ought to like him; she must be made to like him,' he said to himself, his heart suddenly aglow with virtuous, almost heroical resolve.

His heart had thrilled that night in the shadow of the walnut boughs when he heard Daphne's contemptuous rejection of her lover. He had been guiltily glad. And yet he was ready to do his duty: he was eager to play the mediator, and win the girl for that true-hearted lover. He meant to be loyal.

'Poor Daphne!' he sighed. 'Her cradle was shadowed by a guilty mother's folly. She had been cheated out of her father's love. She need have something good in this life to make amends for all she has lost. Edgar would make an admirable husband.'

The *Kelpie* turned her nose towards home next day; and soon Gerald was dreamily watching the play of sunbeam and shadow on the heathery slopes above the Kyles of Bute, very near Greenock, and the station and the express train that was to carry him home. He turned his back almost reluctantly on the sea life, the unfettered bachelor habits. Though he longed to see Madoline again, almost as fondly as he had longed for her four months ago when he was leaving Bergen, yet there was a curious indefinable pain mingled with the lover's yearning. An image thrust itself between him and his own true love; a haunting shape was mingled with all his dreams of the future.

'Pray God she may marry soon, and have children, and get

matronly and dull and stupid!' he said to himself savagely; 'and then I shall forget the dryad of Fontainebleau.'

He travelled all night and got to Stratford early in the afternoon. He had given no notice of his coming, either at the Abbey or South Hill, and his first visit was naturally to the house that held his betrothed. His limbs were cramped and stiffened by the long journey, and he despatched his valet and his portmanteau to Goring in a fly, and walked across the fields to South Hill. It was a long walk and he took his time about it, stopping now and then to look somewhat wistfully at the brown river, on whose breast the scattered leaves were drifting. The sky was dull and gray, with only faint patches of wintry sunlight in the west; the atmosphere was heavy; and the year seemed ever so much older here than in Scotland.

He passed Baddesley and Arden, with only a glance across the smooth lawn at the Rectory, where the china-asters were in their glory, and the majolica vases under the rustic verandah made bright spots of colour in the autumn gloom. Then, instead of taking the meadow path to South Hill, he chose the longer way, and followed the windings of the Avon, intending to let himself into the South Hill grounds by the little gate near Daphne's boat-house.

He was within about a quarter of a mile of the boat-house when he saw a spot of scarlet gleaming amidst the shadows of the rustic roof. The boat-house was a thatched erection of the Noah's Ark pattern, and the front was open to the water. Below this thatched gable-end, and on a level with the river, showed the vivid spot of red. Gerald quickened his pace unconsciously, with a curious eagerness to solve the mystery of that bit of colour.

Yes; it was as he had fancied. It was Daphne, seated alone and dejected on the keel of her upturned boat. The yellow collie darted out and leapt up at him, growling and snapping, as he drew near her. Daphne looked at him—or he so fancied—with a piteous half-beseeching gaze. She was very pale, and he thought she looked wretchedly ill.

'Have you been ill?' he asked eagerly, as they shook hands. 'Quiet, you mongrel!' to the suspicious Goldie.

'Never was better in my life,' she answered briskly.

'Then your looks belie you. I was afraid you had been seriously ill.'

'Don't you think if I had Lina would have mentioned it to you in a postscript, or a *nota bene*, or something?'

'Of course.'

'I detest cold weather, and I am chilled to the bone, in spite of this thick shawl,' she answered lightly, glancing at the scarlet wrap which had caught Gerald's eye from afar.

'I wonder you choose such a spot as this for your afternoon

meditations. It is certainly about the dampest and chilliest place you could find.'

'I did not come here to meditate, but to read,' answered Daphne. 'I have got Browning's new poem, and it requires a great deal of hard thinking before one can quite appreciate it; and if I tell you that Aunt Rhoda is in the drawing-room, and means to stick there till dinner-time, you will not require any further reason for my being here.'

'That's dreadful. Yet I must face the gorgon. I am dying to see Lina.'

'Naturally; and she will be enraptured at your return,' answered Daphne in her most natural manner. 'She has been expecting you every day i' the hour.'

'Eh?'

'"For in a minute there are many days"—Shakespeare.'

'Thank God! I don't object to the bard of Avon half so strongly now. I have been in a country where everybody quotes an uncouth rhymester whom they call Bobbie Bairrns. Shakespeare seems almost civilised in comparison. Will you walk up to the house with me?'

She looked down at her open book. She had not been reading when he came unawares upon her solitude. He had seen that; just as surely as he had seen the faint convulsive movement of her throat, the start, the pallor that marked her surprise at his approach. He had acquired a fatal habit of watching and analysing her emotions; and it seemed to him that she had brightened since his coming, that new light and colour had returned to her face; almost as you may see the revival of a flower that has drooped in the drought, and which revivifies under the gentle summer rain.

She looked at her book doubtfully, as if she would like to say no.

'You had better come with me. It is nearly tea-time, and I know you are dying for a cup of tea. I never knew a woman that wasn't.'

'Exhausted nature tells me that it is tea-time. Yes; I suppose I had better come.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'LOVE WOL NOT BE CONSTREINED BY MAISTRIE.'

A MAN who lives within easy reach of two good packs of foxhounds, and in a fair hunting country on the very edge of the shires, can hardly mope, albeit he may feel that, in a general way, his heart is broken. Thus it was with Edgar Turchill, who hunted four days a week, and came to South Hill on the off-

days to suffer and enjoy all those hot fits and cold fits, those desperate delights plucked from the jaws of pain, which a man feels when he adores a girl who does not care a straw for him. He had been rejected, even with contumely, as it seemed to him: yet so dearly did he delight in Daphne's society that if he were destined never to win her for his own, the next best blessing he asked from Fate was to be allowed to dangle about her for ever—to fetch and carry, to be snubbed, and laughed at, and patronised, as it pleased her wilful humour.

The autumn and early winter were mild—a capital season for hunting.

'What selfish creatures you sporting men are!' cried Daphne one morning, looking gloomily out at the gloomy November day; 'so long as you can go galloping over the muggy fields after innocent foxes you don't care how dreary the world is for other people. We want a hard frost, for then we might have some skating on the pond. I wish the Avon would freeze, so that we could skate to Tewkesbury.'

'I daresay we shall have plenty of hard weather in January,' said Edgar apologetically. It was one of his off-days, and he had ridden over to South Hill directly after luncheon. 'You ought to hunt, Daphne.'

'Of course I ought: but Sir Vernon does not see it in the same light. When I mildly suggested that I thought you wouldn't mind lending me a horse—'

'Mind!' cried Edgar. 'That little mare of mine would carry you to perfection: and she's so clever you'd have nothing to do but to sit upon her.'

'Exactly. It would be a foretaste of paradise. But at my hinting such a possibility my father gave me a look that almost annihilated me.'

'You may be more independently situated next season,' suggested Mr. Goring, looking up from the billiard-table, where he was amusing himself with a few random strokes while Madoline was putting on her hat and jacket for a rustic ramble. 'You may have your own stable, perhaps, and a nice sporting husband to look after it for you.'

Daphne reddened angrily at the suggestion; while poor Edgar put on his sheepish look, and took refuge at the billiard-table.

'Are you coming out for a walk, Empress?' asked Gerald carelessly.

'I don't know. It's such dreary work prowling about a wintry landscape. I think I shall stay at home and read.'

'You'd better come,' pleaded Edgar, feeling that he would not be allowed the perilous bliss of a *tête-à tête* afternoon with her, and that, if such bliss were permissible, the pleasure would be mixed with too deep a pain. Out in the fields and lanes, with Goring and Madoline, he might enjoy her society.

She half consented to go, and then, discovering that Madoline was going to make some calls, changed her mind.

'I'll go to my room and finish my third volume,' she said.

'What a misanthrope you are, Daphne—a female Timon! I think I shall call you Timonia henceforward,' retorted Gerald.

'When it is a question of making ceremonious afternoon visits, I rather hate my fellow-creatures,' replied Daphne, with charming frankness. 'The nicest people one knows are not half so nice as the figments of fancy one meets in a book; and if the book-person waxes stupid, we can shut him up—which one can't do to a living friend.'

So Daphne wished Mr. Turchill good-day, and went off to her own den—the pretty chintz-draperied bedroom, with its frivolities and individualities in the way of furniture and ornament, and its privileged solitude.

Edgar, feeling that he might be a nuisance to the other two if he offered to accompany them, prepared to take his leave, yet with a lingering hope that Madoline would ask him to remain.

Her kindness divined his wish, and she asked him to stay to dinner.

'You're very kind,' he faltered, having dined at South Hill once in the current week, and sorely afraid that he was degenerating into a sponge, 'but I've got a fellow to see at Warwick; I shall have to dine with him. But if you'll let me come back in the evening for a game at billiards?'

'Let you? Why, Edgar, you know my father is always glad to see you.'

'He is very good—only—I'm afraid of becoming a nuisance. I can't help hanging about the place.'

'We are always pleased to have you here—all of us.'

Edgar thanked her warmly. He had fallen into a dejected condition; fancying himself of less account than the rest of men since Daphne had spurned him; a creature to be scorned and trampled under foot. Nor did Daphne's easy kindness give him any comfort. She had resumed her tone of sisterly friendship. She seemed to forget that he had ever proposed to her. She was serenely unconscious that he was breaking his heart for her. Why could he not get himself killed, or desperately hurt in the hunting-field, so that she might be sorry for him? He was almost angry with his horses for being such clever jumpers, and never putting his neck in peril. A purl across a bullfinch, a broken collar-bone, might melt that obdurate heart. And a man may get through life very well with a damaged collar-bone.

'I'm afraid the collar-bone wouldn't be enough,' mused Edgar. 'It doesn't sound romantic. A broken arm, worn in a sling, might be of some use.'

He would have suffered anything, hazarded anything, to improve his chances. He tried to lure Daphne to Hawksyard

again; tempting her with the stables, the dogs, the poultry-yard; but it was no use. She had always some excuse for declining his or his mother's invitations. She would not even accompany Lina when she went to call upon Mrs. Turchill. She had an idea that Edgar was in the habit of offering his hand and heart to every young lady visitor.

'He made such an utter idiot of himself the night we dined there,' she said to Lina. 'I shall never again trust myself upon his patrimonial estate. On neutral ground I haven't the least objection to him.'

'Daphne, is it kind to speak of him like that, when you know that he was thoroughly in earnest?'

'He was thoroughly in earnest about you before. True love cannot change like that.'

'Yet I am convinced that he is true, Daphne,' Lina answered seriously.

Autumn slipped into winter. There was a light frost every night, and in the misty mornings the low meadows glittered whitely with a thin coating of rime, which vanished with those early mists. There was no weather cold enough to curdle the water in the shallow pond yonder by the plantation, or to stop Lord Willoughby's hounds. Daphne sighed in vain for the delight of skating.

Christmas at South Hill was not a period of exuberant mirth. Ever since his second wife's death Sir Vernon Lawford had held himself as much aloof from county society as he conveniently could, without being considered either inhospitable or eccentric. There was a good deal done for the poor, in a very quiet way, by Madoline, and the servants were allowed to enjoy themselves; but of old-fashioned festivity there was none. Mr. and Mrs. Ferrers were asked to dine on Christmas Day. Aunt Rhoda suggested that they should be asked, and accepted the invitation in advance; in order, as she observed, that the bond of family union might be strengthened by genial intercourse upon that sacred anniversary. Gerald was of course to be at South Hill, where at all times he spent more of his waking hours than at Goring Abbey. Edgar had spoken so dolefully of the dulness of a Christmas Day at Hawksyard that Madoline had been moved by pity to suggest that Mrs. Turchill and her son might be invited to the family feast.

'That will make it a party,' said Sir Vernon, when his daughter pleaded for this grace, 'and I am not well enough to stand a party.'

He was not well. Of that fact there could be no doubt. He had been given to hypochondriacal fancies for the last five years, but there was a certain amount of fact underlying these fancies. The effeminately white hand was growing more transparent; the capricious appetite was more difficult to tempt; the

slow promenade on the garden terrace was growing slower ; the thin face was more drawn ; the aquiline nose was sharper in outline. There was a chronic complaint of some obscure kind, vaguely described by a London specialist, and dimly understood by the family doctor, which must eventually shorten the baronet's life ; but his mind was so vigorous and unbending, his countenance so stern, his manner so uncompromising, that it was difficult to believe that Death had set his mark upon him. To his elder daughter alone he revealed the one tender feeling left in him—and that was his very real affection for herself ; a love that was chastened and poetised by his reverent and regretful memory of her mother.

'Dear father, it need not be a party because of the Turchills. Edgar is like one of ourselves, and Mrs. Turchill is so very quiet.'

'Ask them, Lina, ask them, if it will be any pleasure to you.'

'I think it will please Edgar. He says Hawksyard is so dreary at Christmas.'

'If people had not set up a fictitious idea of Christmas gaiety, they would not complain of the season being dull,' said Sir Vernon somewhat impatiently. 'That notion of unlimited junketing doesn't come from any real religious feeling. Peace on earth and goodwill towards men doesn't mean snapdragon and childish foolery. It is a silly myth of the Middle Ages, which sticks like a burr to the modern mind.'

'It is a pleasant idea that kindred and old friends should meet at that sacred time,' argued Lina gently.

'Yes, if kindred in a general way could meet without quarrelling. That there should be a good deal done for the poor at Christmas I can understand and approve. It is the central point of winter ; and then there is the Divine association which beautifies every gift. And that children should look forward to Christmas as an extra birthday in every nursery is a pretty fancy enough. But that men and women of the world should foregather and pretend to be fonder of one another on that day than at any other season is too hollow a sham for my patience.'

Madoline wrote a friendly invitation to Mrs. Turchill, and gave her note to Edgar to carry home that evening.

'It's awfully good of you,' he said ruefully, when she told him the purport of her letter, 'but I'm afraid it won't answer. Mother stands on her dignity about Christmas Day ; and I don't think wild horses would drag her away from her own dining-room. I shall have to dine *tête-à-tête* with her, poor old dear ; and we shall sit staring at the oak panelling, and pretending to enjoy the plum-pudding made according to the old lady's own particular recipe handed down by her grandmother. There has been an agreeable sameness about our Christmas dinner for the last ten years. It is as solemn as a

Druidical sacrifice. I could almost fancy that mother had been out in the woods at daybreak cutting mistletoe with a golden sickle.'

Edgar was correct in his idea of his mother's reply. Mrs. Turchill wrote with much ceremony and politeness that, delighted as she and her son would have been to accept so gratifying an invitation, she must on principle reluctantly decline it. She never had dined away from her own house on Christmas Day, and she never would. She considered it a day upon which families should gather round their own firesides, etc., etc., etc., and remained, with affectionate regards, etc.

'How can a family of two gather round the fireside?' asked Edgar dolefully. 'The dear old mother writes rank nonsense.'

'Don't be down-hearted, Turchill,' said Gerald. 'Perhaps by Christmas twelvemonth you may be a family of three: and the year after that a family of four; and the year after that, five. Who knows? Time brings all good things.'

'I am just as grateful to you, Madoline, as if mother had accepted,' said Edgar, ignoring his friend's speech, though he blushed at its meaning. 'It will be ineffably dreary. If the old lady should go to bed extra early—she sometimes does on Christmas Day—I might ride over, just—just——'

'In time for a rattling good game of billiards,' interjected Gerald. 'Lina and I are improving. You and Daphne needn't give us more than twenty-five in fifty.'

'I'll have a horse ready saddled. Mother likes me to read some of the verses in the "Christian Year" to her after tea. I'm afraid I'm not a good reader, for Keble and I always send her to sleep.'

'Be particularly monotonous on this occasion,' said Daphne, 'and come over in time for a match.'

'You wouldn't be shocked if I came in as late as ten o'clock?'

'I mean to sit up till two,' protested Daphne. 'It is my first Christmas at home, since I was in the nursery. It must be a Shakespearian Christmas. We'll have a wassail bowl: roasted apples bobbing about in warm negus, or something of that kind. I shall copy out some mediæval recipes for Spicer. Come as late as you like, Edgar. Papa is sure to go to bed early. Christmas will have a soporific effect upon him, as well as upon Mrs. Turchill, no doubt: and the Ferrers people will go when he retires; and we can have no end of fun in the billiard-room, where not a mortal can hear us.'

'You seem to be providing for a night of riot—a regular orgy—something almost as dissipated as Nero's banquet on the lake of Agrippa,' said Gerald, laughing at her earnestness.

'Why should not one be merry for once in one's life?'

'Why indeed?' cried Gerald, '*Vogue la galère.*

"Forget me not, *en vogant la galère.*"

There's a line from an early English poet for you, my Shakespearian student.'

Christmas Day was not joyless. Daphne, so fitful in her mirth, so sudden in her intervals of gloom—periods of depression which Sir Vernon, Aunt Rhoda, and Madoline's confidential maid and umquhile nurse Mowser, stigmatised as sulks—was on this occasion all sunshine.

'I have made up my mind to be happy,' she said at breakfast; which meal she and Madoline were enjoying alone in the bright cheery room, the table gay with winter flowers and old silver, a wood fire burning merrily in the bright brass grate. 'Even my father's coldness shall not freeze me. Last Christmas Day I was eating my heart at Asnières, and envying that vulgar Dibb, whose people had had her sent home, and hoping savagely that she would be ever so sick in crossing the Channel. There I was in that dreary tawdry school-room, with half-a-dozen mahogany-coloured girls from Toulon, and Toulouse, and Carcassonne; and now I am at home and with you, and I mean to be happy. Discontent shall not come near me to-day. And you will taste my wassail bowl, won't you, Lina?'

'Yes, dear, if it isn't quite too nasty.'

Lina had given her younger sister license for any kind of mediæval experiments, in conjunction with Mrs. Spicer; and there had been much consultation of authorities—Knight, and Timbs, and Washington Irving—and a good deal of messing in the spacious still-room, with a profligate consumption of lemons and sherry, and spices and russet apples. With the dinner at which her father and the Rectory people were to assist, Daphne ventured no interference; but she had planned a Shakespearian refection in the billiard-room at midnight—if they could only get rid of Aunt Rhoda, whose sense of propriety was so strong that she might perhaps insist upon staying till the two young men had taken their departure.

'I wish we could have old Spicer in to matronise the party,' said Daphne. 'She looks lovely in her Sunday evening gown. She would sit smiling benevolently at us till she dropped asleep; instead of contemplating us as if she thought the next stage of our existence would be a lunatic asylum, as Aunt Rhoda generally does when we are cheerful.'

'I'm afraid you must put up with Aunt Rhoda to-night, Daphne,' answered Madoline. 'She has suggested that she and the Rector should have the Blue Room, as the drive home might bring on his bronchitis.'

'His bronchitis, indeed!' cried Daphne. 'He appropriates the complaint as if nobody else had ever had it. So they are going to stay the night! Of all the cool proceedings I ever

heard of that is about the coolest. And Aunt Rhoda is one of those people who are never sleepy. She will sit us out, however late we are. Never mind. The banquet will be all the more classical and complete. Aunt Rhoda will be the skeleton.'

Daphne contrived to be happy all day, in spite of Mrs. Ferrers, who was particularly ungracious to her younger niece, while she was lavish of compliments and pretty speeches to the elder. The faithful slave Edgar was absent on duty—going to church twice with his mother; dining with her; devoted to her altogether, or as much as he could be with a heart that longed to be elsewhere. But Daphne hardly missed him. Gerald Goring was in high spirits, full of life and talk and fun, as if he too had made up his mind that this great day in the Christian calendar should be a day of rejoicing for him. They all went to church together in the morning, and admired the decorations, which owed all their artistic beauty to Madoline's taste, and were in a large measure the work of her own industrious fingers. They joined reverently in the Liturgy, and listened patiently to the Rector's sermon, in which he aired a few of those good old orthodox truisms which have been repeated time out of mind by rural incumbents upon Christmas mornings.

After luncheon they all three went on a round of visits to Madoline's cottagers—those special, old-established families to whose various needs, intellectual and corporeal, she had ministered from her early girlhood, and who esteemed a Christmas visit from Miss Lawford as the highest honour and privilege of the year. It was pleasant to look in at the tidy little keeping-rooms, where the dressers shone with a bright array of crockery, and the hearths were so neatly swept, and the pots and pans and brass candlesticks on the chimney-piece, and the little black-framed scriptural pictures, were all decorated with sprigs of ivy and holly. Pleasant the air of dinner and dessert which pervaded every house. Daphne had a basket of toys for the children; a basket which Gerald insisted upon carrying, looking into it every now and then, and affecting an intense curiosity as to the contents. The sky was dark, save for one low red streak above the ragged edge of the wooded lane, when they went back to afternoon tea: and what a comfortable change it was from the wintry world outside to Madoline's flowery morning-room, heavy with the scent of hyacinths and Parma violets, and bright with blazing logs! The low Japanese tea-table was drawn in front of the fire, and the basket-chairs stood ready for the tea-drinkers.

'I was afraid Aunt Rhoda would be here to tea,' said Daphne, sinking into her favourite seat on the fender-stool, in the shadow of the draped mantel-piece. 'Is it not delicious to have this firelight hour all to ourselves? I always feel that

just this time—this changeful light—stands apart from the rest of our lives. Our thoughts and fancies are all different somehow. They seem to take the rosy colour out of the fire; they are dim and dreamy and full of change, like the shadows on the wall. *We* are different. Just now I feel as if I had not a care.'

'And have you many cares at other times?' asked Gerald scoffingly.

'A few.'

'The fear that your ball-dress may not fit; or that some clumsy fox-hunting partner may smash the ivory fan which Lina gave you yesterday.'

'Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward,' answered Daphne sententiously. 'Do you think, because I live in a fine house, and have food and raiment found for me, that I do not know the meaning of care?'

'Well, I should fancy there is a long way between your comprehension of the word and that of a Whitechapel seamstress: a widow, with five small children to keep, and a lodging to pay, upon the produce of her needle, with famine or the workhouse staring her in the face.'

'It is the hour for telling ghost stories,' exclaimed Daphne, kneeling at her sister's side to receive her cup and saucer, and trifling daintily with the miniature Queen Anne tongs as she helped herself to sugar. 'Lina, tell us the story of this house. It ought to be haunted.'

'I am thankful to say I have never heard of any ghosts,' answered Madoline. 'Every house that has been lived in fifty years must have some sad memories; but our dead do not come back to us, except in our dreams.'

'Mr. Goring, I insist upon a ghost-story,' said Daphne. 'On this particular day—at this particular hour—in this delicious half-light, a story of some kind must be told.'

'I delight in ghost-stories—good grim old German legends,' answered Gerald languidly, looking deliciously comfortable in the depths of an immense armchair, so low that it needed the dexterity of a gymnast to enable man or woman to get in or out of it gracefully—a downy-cushioned nest when one was there. 'I adore phantoms, and fiends, and the whole shopful; but I never could remember a story in my life.'

'You must tell one to-night,' cried Daphne eagerly. 'It need not be ghostly. A nice murder would do—a grisly murder. My blood begins to turn cold in advance.'

'I am sorry to disappoint you,' said Gerald; 'but although I have made a careful study of all the interesting murders of my age I could never distinctly remember details. I should get hideously mixed if I tried to relate the circumstances of a famous crime. I should confound Rush with Palmer, the Mannings with the Greenacres; put the pistol into the hand that

used the knife; give the dagger to the man who pinned his faith on the bowl. Not to be done, Daphne. I am no *raconteur*. You or Lina had better amuse me. One of you can tell me a story—something classical—John Gilpin, or the Old Woman with her Pig.'

'John Gilpin! a horridly cheerful singsong ballad—and in such a fantastic dreamy light as this! I wonder you have not more sense of the fitness of things. Besides, it is your duty to amuse us. A story of some kind we must have, mustn't we, Lina dearest?'

'It would be very pleasant in this half-light,' answered Lina softly, quite happy, sitting silently between those two whom she loved so dearly, pleased especially at Daphne's brightness and good-humour, and apparently friendly feeling for Gerald.

'You hear,' exclaimed Daphne. 'Your liege lady commands you.'

'A story,' mused Gerald in his laziest tone, with his head lying back on the cushions, and his eyes looking dreamily up at the ceiling, where the lights and shadows came and went so fantastically. 'A story, ghostly or murderous, tragical, comical, amorous, sentimental—well, suppose now I were to tell you a classical story, as old as the hills, or as the laurel-bushes in your garden, the story of your namesake Daphne.'

'Namesake!' echoed the girl, with her golden head resting against the arm of her sister's chair, her eyes gravely contemplative of the fire. 'Had I ever a namesake? Could there be another set of godfathers and godmothers in the world stupid enough, or hard-hearted enough, to give an unconscious innocent such a name as mine?'

'The namesake I am thinking of lived before the days of godfathers and godmothers,' answered Gerald, still looking up at the ceiling, with a dreamy smile on his face; 'she was the daughter of a river-god and a naiad, a wild, free-born, untamable creature, beautiful as a dream, variable as the winds that rippled the stream from which her father took his name. Wooers had sought her, but in vain. She loved the wood and the chase, all free and sylvan delights—the unfettered life of a virgin. She emulated the fame of Diana. She desired to live and die apart from the rude race of men—a woodland goddess among her maidens. Often her father said: "Daughter, thou owest me a son." Often her father said: "Child, thou owest me grandchildren." She, with blushing cheeks, hung on her father's neck, and repulsed the torch of Hymen, as if it were a crime to love. "Let me, like Diana, live unwedded," she pleaded. "Grant me the same boon Jove gave his daughter." "Sweet one," said the father, "thy duty forbids the destiny thy soul desires. Love will find thee out." The river-god spoke words of fatal truth. Love sought Daphne, and he came

in a godlike form. Phœbus Apollo was the lover. Phœbus, the spirit of light, and music, and beauty. He saw her, and all his soul was on fire with love. The dupe of his own oracles, he hoped for victory. He saw Daphne's hair floating carelessly upon the wind; the eyes, like shining stars; the sweet lips, which it was pain to see and not to kiss. But lighter than the wind the cruel nymph fled from him. In vain he called her, in vain he tried to stop her. "Stay, sweet one," he cried, "it is no enemy who pursues thee. So flies the lamb the wolf, the hind the lion, the trembling dove from the strong-winged eagle. But 'tis love bids me follow. Stay thy steps, suspend thy flight, and I will slacken my pursuit. Foolish one, thou knowest not whom thou fliest. No rude mountaineer, or ungainly shepherd pursues thee, but a god before whose law Delphos, Claros, and Tenedos obey; the son of high Jove himself; the deity who reveals the past, the present, and the future; who first wedded song to the stringed lyre. My arrows are deadly, but a deadlier shaft has pierced my heart." Thus and much more he pleaded, yet Daphne still fled from him, heedless of the briers that wounded her naked feet, the winds that lifted her flowing hair. The breathless god could no longer find words of entreaty. Maddened by love he followed in feverish haste; he gained on her; his breath touched her floating tresses. The inexorable nymph felt her strength failing; with outstretched arms, with beseeching eyes, she appealed to the river: "Oh, father, if thy waves have power to save me, come to my aid! Oh, mother earth, open and fold me in thine arms, or by some sudden change destroy the beauty that subjects me to outrage." Scarcely was the prayer spoken when a heavy torpor crept over her limbs; the nymph's lovely shoulders covered themselves with a smooth bark; her hair changed to leaves; her arms to branches; her feet, a moment before so agile, became rooted to the ground. Yet Phœbus still loved. He felt beneath the bark of the tree the heart-beat of the nymph he adored; he covered the senseless tree with his despairing kisses; and then, when he knew that the nymph was lost to him for ever, he cried: "If thou canst not be my wife, thou shalt be at least Apollo's sacred tree. Laurel, thou shalt for ever wreathe my hair, my lyre, my quiver. Thou shalt crown Rome's heroes; thy sacred branches shall shelter and guard the palace of her Cæsars; and as the god, thy lover, shines with the lustre of eternal youth, so, too, shalt thou preserve thy beauty and freshness to the end of time."'

'Poor Daphne,' sighed Lina.

'Poor Apollo, I think,' said Gerald; 'he was the loser. What do you think of my story, Mistress Daphne?'

'I rather like my namesake,' answered Daphne deliberately. 'She was thorough. When she pretended to mean a thing she really did mean it. There is a virtue in sincerity.'

'And obstinacy is a vice,' said Gerald. 'I consider the river-god's daughter a pig-headed young person, whose natural coldness of heart predisposed her to transformation into a vegetable. Apollo made too much of her.'

CHAPTER XIX.

'I DEME THAT HIRE HERTE WAS FUL OF WO.'

ALL the servants at South Hill were old servants. Sir Vernon was a stern and an exacting master, but he only asked fair change for his shilling. He did not expect to reap where he had not sown, nor to gather where he had not strewed. His household was carried on upon a large and liberal scale, and the servants had privileges which they would hardly have enjoyed elsewhere. Therefore, with the disinterested fidelity of their profession, and of the human race generally, they stayed with him, growing old and gray in his service.

Among these faithful followers was one who made a stronger point of her fidelity than any of the others, and affected a certain superiority to all the rest. This was Mowser, Madoline's own maid, who had been maid to Lady Lawford until her death, and who, on that melancholy event, had taken upon herself the office of nurse to the orphan girl. That she was faithful to Madoline, and strongly attached to Madoline, there could be no doubt; but it was rather hard upon the outstanding balance of humanity that she could consider herself privileged by reason of this attachment to be as disagreeable as she pleased to everyone else.

In those early days of Madoline's infancy Mowser had taken possession of the nurseries as her own domain—belonging to her by some sovereign right of custodianship, as entirely hers as if they had been her freehold. Strong in her convictions on this point, she had resented all intrusion from the outer world; she had looked daggers at innocent visitors who were brought to see the baby; she had carried on war to the knife—a war of impertinences and uncivil looks—with Aunt Rhoda, firmly possessed by the idea that an aunt was an outsider as compared with a nurse.

'Didn't I sit up night after night with her when she had the scarlet-fever, and go without my sleep and rest for a fortnight?' said the faithful one, expatiating vindictively upon her wrongs, in the conversational freedom of the servants'-hall. 'Will any of your fine ladies of fashion do that?'

Mrs. Spicer was of opinion that some might, but not Miss Rhoda Lawford. She was a great deal too fond of her own comfort.

Mowser was not a woman of high culture. She had begun the battle of life early, and was too old to have been subject to the exactions of the School Board. She had been born and bred in a Warwickshire village, and educated five-and-thirty years ago at a Warwickshire dame school. Gerald told Daphne that he had no doubt Mowser had every whit as much book-learning as Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden. She was not averse from the use of fine words, but pronounced them after her own fancy. All unauthorised visitors to the nursery she denounced as antelopes, meaning, it was supposed, not the graceful animal of the stag species usually known by that name, but the more obnoxious human individual commonly called an interloper. Even Daphne, when she took the liberty to be born, and was brought by her own particular nurse to Mowser's nursery, was looked upon as belonging in some wise to the antelope family; while the strange nurse was, of course, a thoroughbred specimen of that race. While Daphne was an infant, and the second nurse remained, there were fearful wars and rumours of wars in Mowser's apartments, and exultantly did that injured female lift up her voice when Daphne went to her first school—at an age when few children of the landed gentry are sent to school—and the unsanctified nurse departed. She came a Pariah, and she went a Pariah—a creature under a ban.

'Now I can breathe free,' exclaimed Mowser, after she had ostentatiously opened the windows and aired the nurseries, as in a Jewish household windows and doors are flung wide when the spirit has departed. 'I felt almost stuffocated while she was here.'

Sir Vernon, seeing very little of Mowser, and knowing that she was a devoted nurse to his beloved elder daughter, had troubled himself very little about such complaints of her 'tempers' as from time to time reached his ears. He discouraged all fault-finding in his sister upon principle. So long as everything in the house, which concerned himself and his own comfort, went on velvet, he was unaffected by the fact that the servants made themselves disagreeable to other people. It was no matter to him that Spicer had been abominably impertinent to Aunt Rhoda in the morning, provided his dinner were well cooked in the evening. Nor did Rhoda's raven croakings about the profligate wastefulness of his household distress him. He knew what he was spending, and that his expenses were so nearly on a level with his income that he always seemed poor: but though he liked to growl and grumble after every inspection of his banker's book, he hated to be worried about pounds of butter, and quarts of milk, and dozens of eggs, by his sister.

'If you pretend to keep my house, Rhoda, you must keep it quietly, and not plague me about these disgusting details,' he said savagely; whereat Rhoda shrugged her elegant shoulders,

and protested that if her brother liked to be cheated it was of course no business of hers to step in between him and the depredators.

'I don't like to be cheated, but I like still less to be worried,' said Sir Vernon decisively; and Rhoda was wise enough to carry on the struggle no longer.

She had her own comfort and her own advantage to consider, and she troubled her brother no further about domestic difficulties: but she carried on her war with the enemy vigorously notwithstanding—fiercest of all with Mowser, who looked upon Miss Lawford as the very head and front of the antelope tribe.

Mowser was a servant of the old school. She prided herself upon the manners and habits of a past generation. She wore corkscrew ringlets, and a cap trimmed with real Buckinghamshire lace—none of your Nottingham machine-made stuff for Mowser. Her petticoats were short and scanty, and her side-laced cashmere boots were a relic of the past. She wore an ostentatious gold chain round her neck, and a portly silver watch at her side. She was rarely seen without a black-silk apron, which rustled exceedingly. She was of a bony figure, her face sharp and angular, her eyes a cold hard hard-looking gray.

When Madoline left the nursery Mowser resumed her original function of lady's-maid. She had no particular gifts for the office. She had no taste for millinery; she had no skill in hair-dressing. She had been chosen by Madoline's mother—a young lady of very simple habits—on account of her respectability and local status. She was the daughter of Old Mrs. Somebody, who had been thirty years a servant in the first Lady Lawford's family. The houses of the menial and the mistress had been allied for a century or so; and for this reason, rather than for any other, Jane Mowser had been considered eligible for the office of maid.

She was active and industrious, kept her mistress's wardrobe and her mistress's dressing-room in exquisite order. She could wash and mend laces to perfection. She could pack, and unpack, and was a devoted attendant in illness. But here her powers found their limit. The milliner and the dressmaker had to do all the rest. Mowser had no more taste than any villager in her native hamlet: no capacity for advising or assisting her mistress in any of the details of the toilet. She looked upon all modern fashions as iniquities which were perpetually inviting from heaven a re-issue of that fiery rain which buried Sodom and Gomorrah. To Mowser's mind, jersey jackets and eel-skin dresses, idiot fringes and Toby frills, were the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah's prophecy. These were the 'changeable suits of apparel, the mantles, and the tires, and the crisping pins, the mufflers, and round-tires like the moon;' and all these things

were the forecast of some awful doom. It might be earthquakes, or floods, or a hideous concatenation of railway accidents, or the exhaustion of our coal mines, or the total failure of butcher's meat by reason of the foot-and-mouth disease. Mowser did not know what form the scourge would take ; but she felt that retribution, prompt and dire, must follow the reign of painted faces, jersey bodies, and tight-fitting skirts. Young women could not be allowed so to display their figures with impunity. Providence had an eye on their sham complexions and borrowed locks.

All picturesqueness of attire Mowser resented as a play-actress style of dress, altogether degrading to a respectable mind. She objected to Daphne's neatly-fitting, tailor-made gowns, her soft creamy muslins, relieved by dashes of vivid colour, and thought they would end badly. Not so did young ladies dress in Mowser's youth. Small-patterned striped or checked silks, with neat laced berthas fitting close to modestly-covered shoulders, were then the mode. There was none of that artistic coquetry which gives to every woman's dress a distinctive character, marking her out from the throng.

Vainly did Mowser sigh for those vanished days, the simplicity, the high thinking and plain living, of her girlhood. Here was Mrs. Ferrers wasting the Rector's substance upon gowns which five-and-twenty years ago would have been considered extravagant for a duchess ; here was Daphne dressing herself up—with Madoline's approval—to look as much as possible like a play-actress or an old picture.

Mowser was no fonder of Daphne now than she had been in the days when the unwelcome addition to the nursery was stigmatised as an 'antelope.' There was still a good deal of the antelope about Daphne, in Mowser's opinion. 'It would have been better for all parties if Miss Daphne had stayed a year or two longer at her finishing school,' Mowser remarked sententiously in the housekeeper's room, where she was regarded, or at any rate was known to regard herself, as an oracle. 'First and foremost, she hasn't half finished her education.'

'Haven't she, Mowser?' asked Jinman, Sir Vernon's own man, with a malicious twinkle in his eye. 'How did you find out that? Have you been putting her through her paces?'

'No, Mr. Jinman ; but I hope I know whether a young lady's education is finished, without the help of book learning. My mother was left a lone widow before I was three years old, and I hadn't the opportunities some people have had, and might have made better use of. But I know what a young lady ought to be, and what she oughtn't to be ; and I say Miss Daphne leans most to the last. Why, her manners are not half formed. She goes rushing about the house like a whirlwind ; always in high spirits, or in the dumps—no mejum.'

'She's dev'lish pretty,' said Jinman, who, on the strength of

having spent a good deal of time with his master at Limmer's Hotel, put on a metropolitan and somewhat rakish air.

'She's not fit to hold a candle to my mistress,' retorted Mowser.

'Not such a reg'lar style of beauty, perhaps, but more taking, more "chick,"' said the valet.

'I don't know what you mean by "chick." She's a born flirt. Perhaps that's what you mean. She's her mother all over, worse luck for her! the same ways, the same looks, the same tones of voice. I wish she was out of the house. I never feel safe or comfortable about her. She's like a dagger hanging over my head; and I don't know when she may drop.'

'It's a pity she refused young Turchill,' said Jinman. 'He's the right sort. But as he still hangs on, I suppose she means to have him sooner or later.'

'No, she don't. *That's* not her meaning,' answered Mowser with significance.

'What does she mean, then?'

'I know what she means. I know her; much better than her poor innocent sister does. Masks and artifexes ain't no use with me. I can read her. Mr. Turchill ain't good enough for her. She wants someone better than him. But she won't succeed in her mackinventions, while Mowser is by to file her—double-faced as she is.'

There was a subtlety about Mowser this evening which her fellow-servants were hardly able to follow. They all liked Daphne, for her pretty looks and bright girlish ways, yet, with that love of slander and mystery which is common to humanity in all circles, they rather inclined to hear Mowser hint darkly at the girl's unworthiness. They all preferred the slandered to the slanderer; but they listened all the same.

And now Christmas was over, and the night of the Hunt Ball at Stratford was approaching. It was to be Daphne's first public appearance; first dance; first grown-up party of any kind. She was to see the county people assembled in a multitude for the first time in her life. A few of them she had seen by instalments at South Hill—callers and diners. She had been invited by these to various lawn parties: but her sister had refused all invitations of this kind, wishing that the occasion of Daphne's *début* should be something more brilliant than a mere garden party, a fool's paradise of curates and young ladies.

Daphne looked forward to the night with excitement, but excitement of that fitful kind which was common to her—now on the tiptoe of expectation, anon not caring a straw for the entertainment. There had been the usual talk about gowns; and Aunt Rhoda had insisted upon coming over to South Hill to give her opinion.

'White, of course, for the *débutante*,' said Madoline. 'There can be no question about that.'

Mrs. Ferrers screwed up her lips in a severe manner, and looked at Daphne with a coldly critical stare.

'White is so very trying,' she said, as if Daphne's were not a beauty that could afford to be tried; 'and then it has such a bridal air. I daresay there will be half-a-dozen brides at the ball. I know of two—Mrs. Toddlington, and Mrs. Frank Lothrop.'

'I don't think Daphne need fear comparison with either of those,' answered Madoline, looking fondly at her sister, who was sitting on a cushion at her feet, turning over a book of fashion plates. 'Well, darling, do you see anything there you would like?'

'Nothing. Every one of the dresses is utterly hideous; stiff, elaborate; fantastical, without being artistic; gaged and puffed and pleated, and festooned and fringed and gimped. Please dress me for the ball as you have always dressed me, out of your own head, Lina, without any help from Miss Piper's fashion plates.'

'Shall I, dear? Would you really prefer that to choosing something in the very last fashion?'

'Infinitely.'

'Then I'll tell you what it shall be. I will dress you like a portrait by Sir Joshua. The richest white satin that money can buy, made as simply as Miss Piper can possibly be persuaded to make it. A little thin lace, cloudlike, about your neck and arms, and my small pearl necklace for your only ornament.'

'Madoline, do you think it is wise of you to let Daphne appear in borrowed plumes?' asked Mrs. Ferrers severely. 'It may be giving her wrong ideas.'

'They shall not be borrowed plumes. The necklace shall be my New Year's gift to you, Daphne, darling.'

'No, no, Lina. I am not going to despoil you of your jewels. I have always thought it was dreadfully bad of the Jewesses to swindle the Egyptians before they crossed the Red Sea, even though they were told to do it.'

'Daphne!' screamed Aunt Rhoda; 'your profanity is something too shocking.'

'My pet, I am not going to be contradicted,' said Lina, not remarking upon this reproof. 'The little necklace is yours henceforward. I have more jewellery than I can ever wear.'

'It was your mother's, Madoline, and you ought to respect it.'

'It was my mother's nature to give, and not to hoard, Aunt Rhoda. She would have been ashamed of a selfish daughter. Will that do, Daphne? The white satin and old Mechlin lace, and just one spray of stephanotis in your hair?'

'Nothing could be prettier, Lina.'

'What are you going to wear yourself, Madoline?' asked Mrs. Ferrers with a dissatisfied air. 'I suppose you are going to indulge in a new gown.'

'I have hardly made up my mind to be so extravagant. There is the gold-coloured satin I had for the dinner at Warwick Castle.'

'Much too heavy for a ball. No, you must have something new, Lina, if it be only to keep me in countenance. I had quite made up my mind to wear that pearl-gray sicilienne which you all so much admired; but the Rector insisted upon my getting a new gown from Paris.'

'From Worth?'

'Can you suppose I could be so extravagant? No, Lina; when I venture upon a French gown I get it from a little woman on a third floor in the Rue Vivienne. She was Worth's right hand some years ago, and she has quite his style. I tell her what colours I should like, and how much money I am prepared to spend, and she does all the rest without giving me any trouble.'

It was decided that Madoline should have a new gown of the palest salmon, or blush-rose colour; something which would look well with a profusion of those exquisite tea-roses which MacCloskie produced grudgingly in the winter-tide, burning as much coal in the process as if he were steaming home from China with the first of the tea-gatherings, and wanted to be beforehand with the rest of the trade. Mrs. Ferrers made a good many objections to Daphne's white satin, and was convinced it would be unbecoming to her; also that it would be wanting in style; yet it would be conspicuous, if not positively *outré*. But Lina had made up her mind, and was a person of considerable decision on occasions. Whatever the colour or material chosen, Aunt Rhoda would have objected to it, as she had not been called upon to advise in the matter.

'Well, Lina, my dear, I must go home and give the Rector his afternoon tea,' she said, rising and putting on her fur-lined mantle. 'I might have spared myself the trouble of walking over to discuss the ball dresses. You haven't wanted my advice.'

'It was very sweet of you to come all the same, auntie,' said Lina, kissing her, 'and we might have wanted you badly. Besides, your advice is going to be taken. It is to please you that I am going to have a new gown—which I really don't want.'

'Be sure Miss Piper makes your waist longer. The last was too short. She is not a patch upon my little Frenchwoman. But you are so bent upon employing the people about you.'

'I like to spend my money near home, auntie.'

'Even if you are rewarded by being made a guy. Well, at your age, and with your advantages, you can afford to be careless. I can't.'

New Year's Day passed very quietly. There was much less fuss about the new year at South Hill than there had been at Madame Tolmache's twelve months ago; where the young ladies had prepared a stupendous surprise—of which she was perfectly aware a month beforehand—for that lady, in the shape of an embroidered sofa-cushion; and where the pupils presented each other with boxes of sweetmeats, and gushed exceedingly, in sentiments appropriate to the occasion.

Except that Daphne found the pearl necklace in a little old-fashioned red morocco case under her pillow when she awoke on that first dawn of the year, the day might have been the same as other days. She sat up in her little curtainless bed, with the necklace in her hand, looking straight before her, into the wintry landscape, into the new year.

'What is it going to be like for me? What is it going to bring me?' she asked herself, her eyes slowly filling with tears, her face and attitude, even to the listless hand which loosely held the string of pearls, expressive of a dejection that was akin to despair. 'What will this new-born year bring me? Not happiness. No, that could not be—that can never be. I lost the hope of that a year and a half ago—on one foolish, never-to-be-forgotten summer day. If I had died before that day—if I had taken the fever like those other girls, and had it badly, and died of it, would it not have been a better fate than to be always fluttering on the edge of happiness; wickedly, wildly happy sometimes when I am with him—wretched when he is away; guilty always—guilty to her, my best and my dearest; shameful to myself; lost to honour; conscience-stricken, miserable?'

Her tears fell thick and fast now, and for some moments she wept passionately, greeting the new year with tears. Then, growing calmer, she lifted the pearls to her lips, and kissed them tenderly.

'It shall be a talisman,' she said to herself. 'White gift from a white soul, pure and perfect as the giver. Yes, it shall be a charm. I will sin no more. I will think of him no more of whom to think is sin. I will shut him out of my heart. My love, I will forget you! My love, who held my hand that summer day, and read my fate there—an evil fate—yes, for is it not evil to love you? my love, who stole my heart with sweet low words and magical looks—looks and words that meant nothing to you, but all the world—more than the world—to me. Oh, I must find some way of forgetting you. I must teach myself to be proud. It is so mean, so degrading, to go on loving where I have never been loved. If he knew it, how he would despise me! I would die rather than he should know!'

Hard to face a new-born year in such a temper as this, with a heart heavily burdened by a fatal secret; all the world, to outward seeming, smiles and sunshine. For what care could such a girl as Daphne have, a girl who had no more need for the serious consideration of life than the lilies have? All without sunshine and turtle-doves; all within, darkness and scorpions.

When she was dressed, save for the putting on of her warm winter gown, Daphne clasped the necklace round her throat. The pearls were not whiter or more perfectly shaped than the neck they clasped.

'I must wear my talisman always,' she thought, as she fastened the snap. 'Let me be like the prince in the fairy tale, whose ring used to remind him by a sharp little stab when he was drifting into sin.'

She went downstairs in a somewhat more cheerful mood than that of her first awaking. There was comfort in the pearls. She kissed her sister lovingly, kneeling by her side as she thanked her for the New Year's gift. There was an open jewel-case on the breakfast-table, and beside it a basket of summer flowers—a basket that had come straight from the sunny south, from the winterless flower-gardens on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Daphne looked at the jewels first—a low thing in human nature, but inevitable. The case contained a sapphire cross, the stones large and lustrous, perfect in their deep azure, and set in the lightest, most delicate mounting—a cross which a princess might hold choicest amongst all her jewels. The flowers were roses, camellias, violets, and a curious thorny-stemmed orange-blossom.

'Oh, Lina,' cried Daphne; 'orange-blossom with thorns! Isn't that an evil omen?'

'I hope not, dear, but I like the other kind best. This is almost too spiky to put in a flower-glass. But wasn't it good of Gerald to get these flowers sent over from Nice for a New Year's greeting?'

'Oh, it was he who sent them?'

'Who else? There was a little note at the bottom of the basket; and see, this lovely camellia bud is labelled "For Daphne."'

'"There's rue for you,"' quoted Daphne, with her half-bitter smile. 'Yes, it was very polite of him to remember my existence.'

'There is something else for you, darling—a locket, which Gerald asks me to give you from him. He hopes you will wear it at your first ball.'

She opened a small blue velvet case, and Daphne beheld an oval locket of dead dull gold with a diagonal band of sap-

phires. It had a kind of moonlight effect which was very fascinating.

'No,' said Daphne gently, but with unmistakable resolve; 'I will accept jewels from no one but you. You can afford to give me all I shall ever want, and it is a pleasure to you to give—I know that, dearest—and to me to receive. I cannot accept Mr. Goring's gift, although I appreciate his kindness in offering it.'

'Daphne! He will be dreadfully wounded.'

'No, he won't. He will understand that I have a touch of pride. From my sister all the benefits in the world; but from him nothing—except this cold white bud!'

She put it to her lips involuntarily, unconsciously; but the contact of the flower he had touched thrilled her with mysterious passion—as if it were his very soul that touched her soul. She shivered and turned pale.

'My pet, you are looking so ill this morning, so cold and wretched,' said Madoline, looking up from fond contemplation of her lover's gifts just in time to see that white wan look of Daphne's.

'I am well enough, but it is a cold wretched morning,' answered Daphne, as she bent over the fire, spreading out her dimpled hands before the blaze. 'Don't you think New Year's Day is a horrid anniversary?—beginning everything over again from a fresh starting-point: tempting one to think about the future; obliging one to look back at the past and be sorry for having wasted another year. You will go to church, I suppose, and take your dose of remorse in an orthodox form!'

'Won't you come with me, Daphne? Everyone ought to go to church on New Year's Day, even if it were not a sacred anniversary.'

'Yes, I'll come, if you like. I may as well be there as anywhere else.'

'My darling, is that the way to speak or to think about it?'

'I don't know. I'm afraid I am desperately irreligious. If I had ever found religion do me any good I might be more seriously-minded, perhaps. But when I pray, my prayers seem to come back to me unheard. I am always asking for bread, and getting a stone.'

'Dearest, there can be but one reason for that. You do not pray rightly. Constant, fervent prayer never failed yet to bring a blessing: perhaps not the very blessing we have asked for, but something purer, higher—the peace of God which passeth all understanding. That for the most part is God's answer to faithful prayer.'

'Perhaps that is it. I pray in a half-hearted way. "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below." I am anchored too

heavily to this wicked world. I stretch out my hands to heaven, but not my heart: that is of the earth earthy.'

'Come to church, dear, and this solemn day will bring serious thoughts.'

'I would go if it were only for the sake of going a little way towards heaven with you. Yes, Lina dearest, I will go and kneel by your side, and pray to become more like you.'

'A poor example,' answered Madoline, smiling.

And now Sir Vernon entered, pale and drawn after his late illness, but erect and dignified. There were no family prayers at South Hill, and there never had been since the first Lady Lawford's death. Sir Vernon went to church on Sunday morning, when he considered himself well enough; but all other religious offices he performed in the seclusion of his own rooms. There was therefore no morning muster for prayers, and the servants at South Hill were free to choose their own road to heaven.

Madoline rose to greet her father with loving New Year wishes. Daphne kept her kneeling attitude by the fire, with her face turned towards the blaze, feeling that good wishes from her would be a superfluity.

'My years must always be happy while I have you, dearest,' said Sir Vernon, kissing his elder daughter; and then, with some touch of gentlemanly feeling, bethinking himself of the child he did not love, he laid his hand lightly on Daphne's golden head.

'Good morning, Daphne. A happy New Year to you!' he said gently.

She silently turned from the fire, took her father's hand, and raised it to her lips. It was the first time she had ever done such a thing: a little gush of spontaneous feeling, and the father's heart was touched—touched, albeit, like all Daphne's graces, this little bit of girlish graciousness recalled her mother's fatal charms.

'"Bless me, even me also, O my father!"' she exclaimed, recalling one of the most pathetic passages of Holy Writ.

'God bless and prosper you, my dear.'

'Thank you, papa. That is a good beginning for the year,' said Daphne, stifling a sob. 'I don't think I shall feel like Esau any more.'

'My dearest, what comparisons you make,' cried Madoline. 'In what have you ever been like Esau? Have I ever cheated you?'

'Not willingly, darling,' answered Daphne, nestling close beside Madoline as she began to pour out Sir Vernon's tea. 'You are my benefactress, my guardian angel. Is it your fault if I belong by nature and pedigree to the tribe of Ishmael?'

CHAPTER XX.

'AL SODENLY SHE SWAPT ADOWN TO GROUND.'

THE second week of January was half over, and it was the night of the Hunt Ball. What girl of eighteen, were her breast ever so gnawed by secret cark and care, could refrain from giving way to some excitement upon the occasion of her first dance, and that a dance which was to be danced by all Warwickshire's beauty and chivalry—a dance as distinguished, from a local standpoint, as that famous assembly in Belgium's capital, which was scared by the thunder of distant guns, the prelude of instant war?

Daphne gave herself up wholly to the delight of the hour. She had been unusually cheerful and equable in her temper since New Year's Day. That parental blessing, freely and ungrudgingly given, seemed to have sweetened her whole nature. She went to church with Madoline, and prayed with all her heart and soul, and listened without impatience to a string of seasonable platitudes, culled from the elder divines, and pronounced in a humdrum style of elocution by the Reverend Marmaduke Ferrers. She had been altogether blameless in her bearing and her conduct in this new-fledged year: so much so that Mrs. Ferrers had deigned to concede, with chilly patronage, that Daphne was beginning to become a reasonable being.

She had been fighting her inward battle honestly and bravely. She had avoided as much as possible that society which was so poisonously sweet to her. She had been less exacting to her devoted slave, Edgar. She had given more time to improving studies. She had taken up Mendelssohn's Lieder, and practised them industriously, breathing, ah! too much soul into the pathetic passages, dwelling too fondly on the deep ground-swell of melody, which carries a passionate heart along on its fierce tide, and, in its fervid feeling and exaltation of spirit, is akin to the actual triumph of a happy love.

Unconscious of the danger, and resolutely bent on curing herself of a futile foolish attachment, she yet fed her passion with the fatal food of poetry and music, finding in every heroine she most admired, from Juliet to Enid, a love as inevitably doomed to misery as her own. But all the while she was earnest in her desire to forget.

'If my namesake, in the pride of her purity, could fly from a god who adored her, surely it cannot be hard for me to harden my heart against a man who does not care a straw for me,' she told herself scornfully.

The day of the Hunt Ball brought pleasure enough to thrust aside every other thought. Miss Piper had done as well as if she had been born and bred in Paris. Daphne's white satin

gown fitted the slim and supple figure to perfection. It was not the ivory tint of late years, but that exquisite pearly white, with a blackish tint in the shadows, which one sees in old pictures. Daphne, with her wavy hair coiled at the back of her beautifully-shaped head, and with just one spray of stephanotis nestling in the coils, looked like a Juliet painted by Sir Joshua. It was Juliet's dress, as Juliet used to be dressed by actresses of an age less given to the research of correctness and elaboration in costume. The single string of pearls on the pearly neck, the bodice modestly draping the lovely shoulders, the round white arms peeping from elbow-sleeves of satin and lace, the long loose gloves, the slender feet in white satin sandalled shoes, meant for dancing—not in those impossible high-heeled instruments of torture which Parisian bootmakers have inflicted on weak woman—all had something of an old-fashioned air ; but it was a very lovely old fashion, and Madoline was delighted with the result.

'Rather *outré*, don't you think?' said Mrs. Ferrers, sourly contemplative of Daphne's fresh young beauty, which made her own complexion look so much yellower than usual, when she happened to glance across the girl's shoulder at her own face in the big cheval glass. 'A little too suggestive of Kate Greenaway's Baby Books.'

She was trying to settle herself in her panoply of state, a gorgeous arrangement in ruby velvet and cream-coloured satin, which the little Frenchwoman in the Rue Vivienne had only sent off in time to reach Mrs. Ferrers two hours ago, after keeping her in an agony of mind for the last three days. It was a very splendid gown, so slashed, and draped, and festooned, that it was a mystery how it could ever be put together. The velvet cuirass was laced up the back with thick gold cord, and fitted like a strait-waistcoat ; and the ruby scarf was fringed with heavy bullion, which drooped above a stormy sea of cream-coloured satin, that went billowing and surging round the lady's legs till it met a long narrow streak of ruby velvet lined with satin, which meandered for about twelve feet along the floor. That Mrs. Ferrers must be a nuisance to herself and everybody else in such a dress no one in their senses could doubt ; but then on the other hand the gown was undoubtedly in the latest fashion, and was one which must evoke a pang of envy in every female breast.

'I don't wonder you look disdainfully at my short petticoats, Aunt Rhoda,' said Daphne, smiling at the effect of her sandalled ankles as she pirouetted before the looking-glass ; 'but I think, when it comes to dancing, I shall be better off than you with your velvet train.'

'I am not likely to dance much,' answered Mrs. Ferrers, with dignity. 'Indeed, as a clergyman's wife, I don't know that I shall dance at all.'

'Then you will have to sit with your train coiled round your feet to prevent people walking on it, and that will be worse,' retorted Daphne.

It was a clear cold night, with a brilliant moon—a glorious night for a country drive—frosty, but not severe enough to make the roads slippery; besides, Boiler and Crock were the kind of horses that nobody hesitates to have roughed on occasion.

Sir Vernon had decided on escorting his daughters to the ball. It was a sacrifice of his own ease and comfort, but he felt that the occasion required it.

'I shall stay an hour,' he said, 'and then Rodgers can drive me home, and go back to fetch you later. It won't hurt the horses going over the ground a second time.'

'Dear father,' said Madoline, 'it is so good of you to go with us.'

And now, after a reviving cup of tea, and careful wrapping in fur-lined cloaks and Shetland shawls, the three ladies and Sir Vernon conveyed themselves into the roomy landau, and were soon bowling along the smooth high-road towards Stratford. What a transformed and glorified place the little town seemed to-night—all lights, and people, and loud and authoritative constabulary! such an array of fiery-eyed carriages, three abreast in the wide street in front of The Red Horse! such a block in the narrower regions about the Town Hall! so much confusion, despite of such loud endeavours to maintain order!

It seemed to Daphne as if they were going to sit in the carriage all night, with the humbler townsfolk peering in at them from the pavement, and making critical remarks to each other in painfully distinct voices.

'Ain't the fair one pretty?' 'The dark one's the handsomest.' 'My eye! look at the old lady's diamonds.' 'That's Lord Willerby.' 'No, it ain't, stoopid.' 'I see the coronet on the kerridge.' 'My, what lovely hair she's got!' 'White satin, ain't it?' and so on, while cornets and violins sounded in the distance with distracting melody.

'It'll be dreadful if we have to sit in the street quite all the evening,' said Daphne, listening hopelessly to the voice of authority, with its perpetual 'Move on, coachman.'

They waited about twenty minutes, and then slowly drove up to the doorway, where the eager faces of the crowd made a hedge on each side. Difficult to believe that this entrance hall, luminous with lamps and bright flowers, was the same which gave admittance to such prosaic beings as town-clerks and vestrymen, justices of the peace and policemen. Edgar and Gerald were both hovering near the doorway, waiting for the South Hill party: Edgar, at the risk of being accused of deserting his mother, whom he had established in a comfortable corner of the ball-room, and then incontinently left to her own reflections, or

to such conversation as she might be able to find among sundry other dowagers arrived at the same wall-flower stage of existence.

'I thought you were never coming,' said Edgar, offering Daphne his arm, and in a manner appropriating her.

'I thought we were going to spend the evening in the street,' answered Daphne.

Gerald gave his arm to Madoline; Sir Vernon followed with his sister, whose high-heeled Louis Quinze shoes matched her gown to perfection, but were not adapted for locomotion. Happily she was a light and active figure, and managed to trip up the broad oak stairs somehow; though she felt as if her feet had been replaced by the primitive style of wooden leg, the mere dot-and-go-one drumstick, with which the Chelsea pensioner used to be accommodated before the days of elaborate mechanical arrangements in cork and metal.

The ball-room was already crowded, the South Hill party having arrived late, by special desire of Aunt Rhoda, who strongly objected to be among those early comers who roam about empty halls dejectedly, taking the chill off the atmosphere for the late arrivals. Dancing was in full swing, and the assembly in the big ball-room made a blaze of colour against the delicate French-gray walls: the pink of the fox-hunters, and the uniforms of the officers from Warwick and Coventry, showing vividly amongst the pale and airy drapery of their partners. There were more than two hundred in the room already, Edgar told Daphne, as he pointed out the more striking features of the scene.

'I daresay there'll be nearer three hundred before midnight,' he said. 'It's going to be a grand affair. Only once in two years, you see: people save themselves up for it. A lot of fellows in pink, aren't they?'

'Yes. Why didn't you wear a scarlet coat? It's much prettier than black.'

'Do you really think so? If I'd known—' faltered Edgar. 'But I felt sure you would have laughed at me if I'd sported the swallow-tail I wear at hunt dinners sometimes.'

'I daresay I should,' Daphne answered coolly; 'but you'd have looked ever so much nicer all the same.'

Edgar felt regretful. He had debated with himself that question of pink or no pink; and the thought of Daphne's possible ridicule had turned the scale in favour of sober black; and now she told him he would have looked better in the more distinctive garb. And there were fellows who could hardly jump a drain-pipe showing off in their Poole or Smallpage coats, and giving themselves Nimrod airs which imposed upon the sweet simplicity of their partners.

The room was a noble room, long and lofty, divided from a spacious antechamber by a wide square doorway, supported by

classic pillars. Over this doorway was the open gallery for the band. The ball-room was lighted by a large central chandelier, and two sun-burners in the ceiling; while from lyre-shaped medallions on the walls projected modern gas brackets in imitation of old-fashioned girandoles of the wax-candle period.

There were four full-length portraits on the walls: the Duke of Dorset, by Romney; a portrait of Queen Anne, as uninteresting as that harmless lady was in the flesh. The remaining two pictures had to do with the local divinity. One was Gainsborough's portrait of Garrick, leaning against the bust of Shakespeare; the other was the poet seated, in his habit as he lived, by Wilson.

'You see,' said Gerald, close behind Daphne, 'there is the Warwickshire idol. One can't get away from him. Why can these bucolics worship nothing but the intellectual emanation of their soil? Why not a little homage to muscular christianity, in the person of Guy, Earl of Warwick, a paladin of the first water, a man who rescued damsels, and fought with giants and dun cows, and was strong and brave, and faithful, pious, self-sacricing, devoted in every act of his life? There is a hero worthy of worship. Yet you all ignore him, and bow down before this golden calf of a dramatist, who sued his friend for a twopenny loan, and left the wife of his bosom a second-best bedstead—a paltry fellow beside Guy, the hero-hermit, living on bread and water, and only revealing himself at his death to the wife he adored.'

'Guy was a very nice person, if one could quite believe in the giant and the dun cow,' said Daphne.

'I believe implicitly in Colbrand the giant,' answered Gerald, 'but I own I have never been able to swallow the monster cow; and I am all the more inclined to repudiate her because her bones were on view at Warwick in Shakespeare's time.'

'And it was very sweet of him to end his days so quietly in the hermit's cave at Guy's Cliff,' pursued Daphne, who was well versed in all Warwickshire lore, chiefly by oral instruction from Edgar, 'and to take alms from his own wife every morning, as one of the thirteen beggars she was in the habit of relieving; though I have never quite understood why he did it. But in spite of all these grand acts of Guy's we know nothing of the man himself, while Shakespeare is like one's brother. He has sounded the deep of every mind, and has given us the treasures of his own.'

'I suspect he would rather have given anything than his money,' retorted Gerald.

They had penetrated to Mrs. Turchill's corner by this time. That matron was looking the picture of disconsolate solitude—the dowager with whom she had been talking about her servants and her tradespeople having left her to look after a brace of

somewhat go-ahead daughters, who in pale blue silk jerseys, and tight cream-coloured cashmere skirts, looked very much as if they were attired for some acrobatic performance.

'I am so glad you have come,' exclaimed poor Mrs. Turchill, brightening at the sight of Madoline. 'The room is dreadfully crowded, and there are so many strangers.' This was said resentfully, no stranger having any more right to be present, from Mrs. Turchill's point of view, than Pentheus at his mother's party. 'I feel as if I hardly knew a creature here.'

'Oh, mother, when there are the Hilldrops, and the Westerns, and the Hilliers, and the Perkinses,' remonstrated Edgar, running over a string of names.

'All I can say is that if there are any of my friends in the room no one has taken the trouble to bring them to me,' retorted Mrs. Turchill. 'And for any enjoyment I have had from the society of my friends I might as well be at that horrid Academy conversazione for which you took so much trouble to get tickets the year before last, and where I was jammed into a corner of the sculpture room half the evening, with rude young women sitting upon me.'

Here Sir Vernon and Mrs. Ferrers approached, and Mrs. Turchill resumed her company smile in honour of people of such importance. Aunt Rhoda had been exchanging greetings with the cream of the county people during her leisurely progress through the rooms, and felt that her gown was a success, and that the little woman in the Rue Vivienne was worthy of her hire. Everybody was looking at Daphne. Her youth and freshness, her vivid smiles and natural girlish animation, as she conversed now with Edgar, and anon with Gerald, fascinated everyone; it was a manner entirely without reserve, yet with no taint of forwardness or coquetry—the manner of a happy child, whose sum of life was bounded by the delight of the moment, rather than of a woman conscious of her loveliness, and knowing herself admired.

'Who is that pretty girl in the white satin frock—the girl like an old picture?' people were asking, somewhat to the annoyance of older stagers in the beauty-trade, who felt that here was a new business opened, which threatened competition, stock-in-trade of the best quality, and perfectly fresh.

One young lady, whose charms had suffered the wear and tear of seven seasons, contemplated Daphne languidly through her eye-glass, and summed her up with scornful brevity as 'the little Gainsborough girl!'

'Quite too lovely, for the next six months,' said another, 'but her beauty depends entirely on her complexion. A year hence she will have lost all that brightness, and will be a very wishy-washy little person.'

'And then I suppose she'll paint, as the others do, don't you

know,' drawled her partner ; 'carmine her lips, and all that sort of thing.'

The lady looked at him suspiciously out of the corner of a carefully darkened eyelid.

'Let us hope she won't sink quite so low as that,' she said with dignity.

There was no doubt as to Daphne's triumph. Before she had been an hour in the room, she was the acknowledged belle of the ball. People went out of their way to look at her. She walked once round the rooms on her father's arm, and in that slow and languid progress held, as it were, her first court. It was her first public appearance ; her father's friends clustered round him, eager to be presented to the *débutante*. Stately dowagers begged that she might be made known to them. All the best people in the room knew Sir Vernon, and all professed a friendly desire to know his younger daughter. Her card was full before she knew what she was doing.

'Our little Daphne is a success !' said Gerald to his betrothed, as they glided round the room in a languorous troistemps. 'All the Apollos are running after her.'

'I am so glad. Dear child ! It is such a pleasure to see her happy,' answered Madoline softly.

'I hope her head won't be turned by all this adulation. It is such a poor little puff-ball of a head. I sometimes fancy she has thistledown inside it instead of brains.'

'Indeed, dear, she has plenty of sense and serious feeling,' remonstrated Madoline, wounded by this allegation. 'But she is painfully sensitive. She needs very tender treatment.'

'Poor butterfly !'

'Do you like her dress ?'

'It is simply perfect. Your taste, of course.'

'Yes ; she let me have my own way in the matter.'

'And as a reward she is looking her loveliest. It is not the calm beauty of a princess, like my Lina's ; but for a spoiled-child kind of prettiness, capricious, mutinous, variable, there could be nothing better.'

Later he was at Daphne's side, as she sat in a corner by her aunt, with half-a-dozen young men hovering near, Edgar nearest of all, holding her fan.

'I suppose you have saved at least one dance for me, Empress,' he said, taking her programme from her hand.

'I don't know. All sorts of people have been writing down their names.'

'All sorts of people,' echoed Gerald, examining the card. 'You will be a little more respectful about your partners in your seventh or eighth season. Why, here, under various hieroglyphics, are the very topmost strawberries in the social basket—masters of foxhounds, eldest sons of every degree,

majors and colonels—and not one little waltz left for me! I claim you for the first extra.'

'I—I'm rather afraid I'm engaged for the extras.'

'No matter. You were solemnly engaged to me for one particular waltz when first this ball was spoken of at South Hill. You don't remember, perhaps; but I do. I claim my bond. I will be a very Shylock in the exaction of my due.'

'If you were a better Shakespearian it would occur to you that Shylock got nothing,' retorted Daphne, smiling up at him.

'He was an old idiot. Remember, the first extra valse. We shall meet at Philippi.'

He was off to claim Lina for the Lancers. It was the last dance before supper. Sir Vernon had disappeared ever so long ago. Mrs. Ferrers was standing up with a major of dragoons, in all the splendour of his uniform, and felt that she and her partner made an imposing picture. Edgar and Daphne were sitting out this square dance on the stairs, the girl somewhat exhausted by much waltzing, the man exalted to the seventh heaven of bliss at being permitted to bear her company.

'May I take you down to supper?' he asked.

'Thanks; no. My last partner—the man in the red coat——'

'Clinton Chetwynd, master of the Harrowby Harriers?' interjected Edgar.

'Told me that the best dancing will be when two-thirds of the people are gormandising downstairs. You can get me an ice, if you like.'

Edgar obeyed; but when he came back with the ice Daphne had vanished from the landing, and he got himself entangled in a block of people struggling down to supper.

The rooms below—those solemn halls in which on ordinary occasions the local offender stood at the bar of justice to answer for his misdeeds—were now a scene of glitter and gaiety; flower-wreathed épergnes, barley-sugar pagodas, and all the tinselly splendour of a ball-supper. Bar, and bench, and magisterial chairs had vanished as if by magic. The magistrate's private apartment and the justice hall had been thrown into one spacious banqueting-chamber, where even the proverbial greediness of the best society—the people who tread upon each other's toes and rush for the grapes and peaches at Buckingham Palace—might be satisfied without undue scrambling. But though there would have been room for him at the banquet, and although there were any number of eligible young ladies waiting to be taken down, Edgar scorned the idea of a supper which Daphne did not care for. To have sat by her, squeezed into some impossible corner of a rout-seat, to have fought for lobster-salad for her, and guarded her frock from the ravages of awkward people, and pulled cracker bon-bons with her, would have

been bliss; but the festal board without her would be every whit as funereal a banquet as the famous sable feast at which that cheerful practical joker Domitian entertained his courtiers.

Mr. Turchill found a good-natured fox-hunter to take his mother down, and having seen that lady's silver-gray satin—newly done up with violet velvet by Miss Piper for the occasion—making its deliberate way down the broad staircase, on the sportsman's sturdy scarlet arm, Edgar went back to the almost empty ball-room, where about fifteen or twenty couples were revolving to the last sugary-sweet German waltz, '*Glaubst du nicht?*'

Daphne and Gerald were amongst these; Madoline was sitting with some girl-friends in the entrance of one of the windows, and to this point Edgar made his way.

'You've not been down to supper,' he remarked, by way of saying something original.

'Do you know, I don't much care about going down. If Gerald particularly wishes it I shall go after this dance; but I think I should enjoy a sandwich and a cup of tea when I get home better than the scramble downstairs.'

The waltzers were dropping off by degrees; but Gerald and Daphne still went on revolving with gliding languid steps to the dreamy melody. They moved in exquisite harmony, although this was the first time they had ever waltzed together. Never in the twilight dances at South Hill had Mr. Goring asked Daphne to be his partner. He had been content to stand outside in the porch, smoking his cigarette, and looking on, while she and Edgar waltzed, or to take a few lazy turns afterwards with Madoline to Daphne's music. To-night for the first time his arm encircled her; her sunlit head rested against his shoulder. It seemed to him that his hand had never clasped hers since that summer-day at Fontainebleau, just a year and a half ago; when they had stood by the golden water, with the hungry-eyed carp watching them, and a sky of molten gold above their heads. They had been far apart since that day; dissevered by an impalpable abyss; and now for the moment they were one, united by that love-sick melody, their pulses stirred by the same current. Was it strange that in such a moment Gerald Goring forgot all the world except this perfect flower of youth and girlhood which he held in his arms—forgot his betrothed wife, and all her grace and beauty; lived for the moment, and in the moment only, as butterflies live—with a past not worth remembering, and annihilation for their only future? As the dancers dropped off the band played slower and slower, meaning to expire in a *rallentando*, and those two waltzers gliding round drifted unawares into the outer and smaller room, where there was no one.

'*Glaubst du nicht?*' sighed the band, '*Glaubst du nicht?*

Ach Liebchen, glaubst du nicht?' and with the last sigh of the melody, Gerald bent his lips over Daphne's golden hair and breathed a word into her ear—only one word, wrung from him in despite of himself. But that one word so breathed from such lips was all the history of a passionate love which had been fought against in vain. The last sigh of the music faded as the word was spoken, and Daphne was standing by her partner's side white as ashes.

'Take me back to my sister, please.'

He gave her his arm without a word, and they walked slowly across to the group by the window; but before Madoline could make room for Daphne to sit by her side the girl tottered, and would have fallen, if Edgar had not caught her in his arms.

'She is fainting!' he cried, alarmed. 'Some water—brandy—something!' He wrenched open the window, still holding Daphne on his left arm. The frosty night-air blew in upon them, keen and cold. Daphne's white lips trembled, and the dark gray eyes opened and looked round with a bewildered expression, as she sank slowly into the seat beside Madoline, whose arms were supporting and embracing her.

'My darling, you have danced too much. You have over-excited yourself,' said Lina tenderly; while three or four smelling-bottles came to the rescue.

'Yes; that last dance was too much,' faltered Daphne, cold and trembling in her sister's arms. 'But I'm quite well now, Lina. It was nothing. The heat of the room.'

'And you are tired. We'll go home directly we can find Aunt Rhoda.'

'I'll go and hunt for her,' said Gerald, who had been standing vacantly looking on, his brain on fire, his heart beating tumultuously, the vulture conscience gnawing his vitals already.

He had been thinking of Rousseau's Julie, and that first kiss given in the bosquet—the fatal first kiss—the beginning of all evil.

'My sweeter Julie—so much more lovely—so much more innocent,' he thought, as he went slowly downstairs in quest of the ruby velvet arrangement which contained Mrs. Ferrers. 'God give me grace to respect your purity!'

The winter wind rushed into the heated ball-room with a sharp chill breath that was suggestive of another and a colder world, like the deadly air from a vault, and soon steadied Daphne's reeling brain.

'You see I am not such a good waltzer as I thought I was,' she said, looking up at Edgar with a sickly smile. 'I did not think anything could make me giddy.'

'You would rather go home now, would you not, dear?' asked Madoline. 'You have had enough of the ball.'

'More than enough.'

'Let me fetch your wraps from the cloak-room,' said Edgar. 'It will save you a good deal of trouble.'

'If you would be so very kind.'

'Delighted. Give me your ticket. Seventy-nine. All under one number, I suppose.'

He ran off, and this time had to stem the tide setting in towards the ball-room; the young men and maidens who had eaten their supper and were eager for more dancing. Coming back with a pile of cloaks and shawls on his arm, he joined Gerald and Mrs. Ferrers, her red-coated major still in attendance.

'What can Daphne mean by making a spectacle of herself at her first ball?' asked Aunt Rhoda, not a little aggrieved at being ruthlessly dragged away from a knot of the very best people, a little group of privileged ones, which included a countess and two baronets' wives. 'But it is just like her.'

'There was no affectation in the matter, I can assure you,' said Edgar indignantly; 'she looked as white as death.'

'Then she should have danced less. I detest any exhibition of that kind. I am very glad my brother was not here to see it.'

'I think Sir Vernon has had so much reason to be proud of his daughter this evening that he would readily have forgiven her iniquity in fainting,' retorted Edgar, his blood at boiling-point from honest indignation.

Daphne, wrapped in a long white cashmere cloak lined with white fur, looked very pale and ghostlike as she went slowly through the rooms on Edgar's arm, attacked on her way by the reproaches of the partners with whom she was breaking faith by this untimely departure.

'I'm awfully sorry,' she said, with a faint touch of her natural gaiety, 'but I'll pay my debts this time two years. The engagements can stand over.'

When the bi-annual Hunt Ball comes round at Stratford-on-Avon there are some, perhaps, who will remember her promise, and the pale, pathetic face, and white-robed figure.

Five minutes later the three ladies were seated in their carriage, Mrs. Ferrers still grumbling, while Edgar lingered at the door adjusting Daphne's wraps.

Just as he was going to shut the door, having no excuse for further delay, Daphne took his hand and clasped it with friendly warmth.

'How good you are!' she said softly, looking up at him with eyes that to his mind seemed lovelier than all the lights of the firmament, infinitely glorious on this frosty night in the steel-blue sky. 'How good you are! how staunch and true!'

It was only well-merited praise, but it moved him so deeply

that he had no power to answer, even by the smallest word. He could only grasp the slender little hand fervently in his own, and then shut the carriage-door with a bang, as if to drown the tumult of his own heart.

'Home, coachman,' he called, in a choking voice: an entirely superfluous mandate, neither coachman, nor footman, nor horses, having the least idea of going anywhere else.

CHAPTER XXI.

'FOR WELE OR WO, FOR CAROLE, OR FOR DAUNCE.'

EDGAR went back to the ball-room with his heart so penetrated with bliss, that the whole scene had an unreal look to him in its brightness and gaiety, as if in the next instant dancers, and lights, and music, and familiar faces might vanish altogether, and leave him suspended in empty space, alone with his own deep delight. He was as near Berkeley's idea of the universe as a man so solid and substantial in his habits could be. Thought and feeling to-night made up his world; all the rest might be nothing but a spectral emanation from his own brain. He lived, he thought, he felt; and his heart and brain were filled with one idea, and that was Daphne. The ball-room without Daphne, albeit the Caledonians were just being danced with considerable spirit, was all falsehood and hollowness. He saw the spurious complexions, the scanty draperies, all the artificial graces and meretricious charms, as he had not seen them while she was there. That little leaven had leavened the whole lump. His eye, gladdened by her presence, had seen all things fair. But although he was inclined to look contemptuously upon the crowd in which she was not, the gladness of his heart made him good-naturedly disposed to all creation. He would have liked to leave that gay and festive scene immediately; but finding his mother enjoying herself very much in a snug corner with three other matrons, all in after-supper spirits, he consented to wait till Mrs. Turchill had seen one or two more dances.

'I like to watch them, Edgar,' she said, 'though I feel very thankful to Providence that we didn't dance in the same style, or wear such tight dresses, in my time. I remember reading that they wore scanty skirts and hardly any bodices in the period of the French Revolution, and that some of their fashionable women even went so far as to appear with bare feet, which is almost too revolting to mention. All I can say is, that I hope the dresses I see to-night are not the signs of an approaching revolution in England; but I should hardly be surprised if they were. Do go and get a nice partner and let me see you waltz,

Edgar. You've improved wonderfully since the Infirmary Ball last year.'

'I'm glad you think so, mother, but I shan't dance any more to-night. I made no engagements for after supper, except with Daphne, and she has gone home.'

'Oh, the South Hill people have gone, have they? Well, if you're not going to dance any more perhaps we may as well be going too,' said Mrs. Turchill, perceiving that a good many of the county people were slipping quietly away, and not wishing to be left with the masses.

So Edgar, very glad to escape, gave his mother his arm and assisted her to the cloak-room, where she completely extinguished herself in a valuable though somewhat old-fashioned set of sables, which covered her from head to foot, and made her look like a walking haystack.

How full of happy fancies the young man's mind was as they drove through the lanes and cross-country roads to Hawksyard under that brilliant sky, so peopled with worlds of light—'gods, or the abodes of gods;' he cared to-night no more than Sardanapalus what those stars might be—with now a view of distant hills, far away towards the famous Wrekin, a cloudlike spot in the extreme distance, and now vivid gleams of the nearer river, glittering under those glittering stars.

'Isn't it a delicious night, mother?' he cried, and only a gentle snore—a snore expressive of the blissfulness of repose after exertion—breathed from the matronly mass of furred cloak and hood.

He was quite alone—glad to be alone—alone with his new sense of happiness, and the starry night, and the image of his dear love.

She had spoken him fair; she meant to make him happier than man ever was upon earth, since the earth could have produced but one Daphne. She must have meant something by those delicious words, that sweet spontaneous praise. Unsolicited she had taken his hand and pressed it with affectionate warmth—she who had been so cold to him—she who had never evinced one touch of tender feeling before; only a frank, sisterly kindness, which was more galling than cruelty. And to-night she had lifted up her eyes and looked at him—eyes so mournfully sweet, so exquisitely beautiful.

'My angel, that marble heart is melted at last,' he said to himself. 'Who would not be constant, for such a reward?'

He had only been in love with Daphne a little over six months, yet it seemed to him now that in that half year lay the drama of his life. All that went before had been only prologue. True that he had fancied himself in love with Madoline—the lovely and gracious lady of his youthful dreams—but this was but the false light that comes before the dawn. He felt some

touch of shame at having been so deceived as to his own feelings. He remembered that afternoon in the meadows between South Hill and Arden Rectory, when he had poured his woes into Daphne's sympathising ears; when she, his idol of to-night, his idol for evermore, had seemed to him only a pretty school-girl in a muslin frock. Was she the same Daphne? Was he the same Edgar? She who now was a goddess in his sight. He who wondered that he could ever have cared for any other woman. The disciple of Condillac, when he sits himself down seriously to think out the question whether the rose which he touches and smells is really an independent existence, or only exists in relation to his own senses, was never in a more bewildered condition than honest Edgar Turchill when he remembered how devotedly, despairingly, undyingly, he had once loved—or fancied that he loved—Madoline.

'Romeo was the same,' he told himself sheepishly, having taken to reading Shakespeare of late, to curry favour with that fervid little Shakespearian, Daphne; 'madly in love with Rosaline at noon—over head and ears in love with Juliet before midnight. And critics say that Shakespeare knew the human heart.'

Sleep that night was impossible for the master of Hawksyard. Happily there was but a brief remnant of the night left in which he need lie tossing on his sleepless couch, staring at the brown oak panels, where the reflection of the night-lamp glimmered like a dim starbeam in a turbid pool. Cold wintry dawn came creeping over the hills, and at the first streak of daylight he was up and in his icy bath, and then on with his riding-clothes and away to the stable, where only one sleepy underling was moving slowly about with a lantern, calling drowsily to the horses to stand up and come out of a warm stable, in order to be tied to a wall and have pails of water thrown at them in a cold yard.

To saddle Black Pearl with his own hands was but five minutes' work, and in less than five more he was clattering under the archway and off to the nearest bit of open country, to take it out of the mare, who had not done any work for a week, and was in a humour to take a good deal out of her rider. Edgar this morning felt as if he could conquer the wildest horse that ever was foaled—nay, the Prince of Darkness himself, had he been called upon to wrestle with him under an equine guise.

A hard gallop over a broad expanse of flat common, where the winter rime lay silver-white above the russet sward, quieted horse and rider; and, after a long round by lane and wood, Edgar rode quietly back to Hawksyard between ten and eleven, just in time to find his mother seated at breakfast, and wondering at her own dissipation.

After this unusually late breakfast Mr. Turchill went to look at his horses—a regular thing on a non-hunting morning. 'I

took it out of the mare,' he said, as Black Pearl stood reeking in her box, waiting to cool down before she was groomed.

'Indeed you have, sir,' answered his head man—a faithful creature, but not ceremonious with a master he adored. 'You don't mean hunting her to-morrow, I suppose?'

'Well, yes, I did, if the weather allows. Don't you think she'll be fit?'

'I think you've pretty well whacked her out for the next week to come. She won't touch her corn.'

'Poor old woman!' said Edgar, going into the box and fondling the beautiful black head. 'Did we go too fast, my girl? It was as much your fault as mine, my beauty. I think we were both bewitched; but I must take the nonsense out of you somehow, before you carry a lady.'

'You didn't think of putting a lady on that mare, did you, sir?' asked the groom.

'Yes, I do. I think she'd carry a lady beautifully.'

'So she would, sir; but she wouldn't carry the same lady twice. There'd be very little left of the lady when she'd done.'

'Think so, Jarvey? Then we must find something better for the lady—something as safe as a house, and as handsome as —as paint,' concluded Edgar, whose mind was not richly stocked with poetical similes. 'If you hear of anything very perfect in the market you can let me know.'

'Yes, sir.'

It seemed early in the day to think of buying a horse for a wife who was yet to be won; but, encouraged by those few words of Daphne's, Edgar saw all the future in so rosy a light that, this morning, freshened and exhilarated by his long ride, he felt as secure of happiness as if the wedding-bells were ringing their gay joy-peal over the flat green fields and winding waters. He was longing to see Daphne again, to win from her some confirmation of his hope; and now as he moved about the poultry-yard and gardens he was counting the minutes which must pass before he could with decency present himself at South Hill.

It would not do for him to go there before luncheon. Everybody would be tired. Afternoon tea-time would perhaps be the more agreeable hour. It was a period of the day in which women always seemed to him more friendly and amiable than at any other time—content to lay aside the most enthralling book, or the newest passion in fancy-work, and to abandon themselves graciously to the milder pleasures of society.

The afternoon was so fine that he went on foot to pay his visit, glad to get rid of the time between luncheon and five o'clock in a leisurely six-mile walk. It was a delicious walk by meadow, and copse, and river-side, and although Edgar knew every inch of the way, he loved nature in all her moods so well

that the varying beauties of a frosty winter afternoon were as welcome to his eye and spirit as the lush loveliness of midsummer; and he was thinking of Daphne all the way, picturing her smile of greeting, feeling the thrilling touch of her hand, warm in his own.

Madoline, or Sir Vernon, would ask him to dinner, no doubt; and then, some time during the evening, he would be able to get Daphne all to himself in the conservatory, on the stairs, in the corridor. His heart and mind were so full of purpose that he felt what he had to say could be said briefly. He would ask her if she had not repented her cruelty that night in the walnut walk; if she had not found out that true love, even from a somewhat inferior kind of person, was worth having—a jewel not to be flung under the feet of swine. And then, and then, she would lift up those sweet eyes to his face—as she had done last night—and he would clasp her unreproved in his arms, and know himself supremely blest. Life could hold no more delight. Death might come that moment and find him content to die.

It was dusk when he came to South Hill, a frosty twilight, with a crimson glow of sunset low down in the gray sky, and happy robins chirruping in the plantations, where the purple rhododendrons flowered so luxuriantly in spring-time, and where scarlet berries of holly and mountain ash enlivened the dull dark greenery of winter. The house on the hill, with its many windows, some shining with firelight from within, others reflecting the ruddier light in the sky, made a pleasant picture after a six-mile tramp through a somewhat lonely landscape. It looked a hospitable house, a house full of happy people, a house where a man might find a temporary haven from the cares of life. To Edgar's eyes the firelight shining from within was like a welcome.

'Miss Lawford at home?' he inquired.

'Not at home,' answered the footman with a decisive air.

Now there is something much more crushing in the manner of a footman when he tells you that his people are out than in that of the homelier parlour-maid who gives the same information. The girl would fain reconcile you to the blow; she sympathises with you in your disappointment. Perhaps she offers you the somewhat futile consolation implied in the fact that her mistress has only just stepped out, or comforts you with the distant hope that your friend will be home to dinner. She would be glad if she could to lessen your regret. But the well-trained man-servant looks at you with the blank and stony gaze of a blind destiny. His voice is doom. 'Not at home,' he says curtly; and if, perchance, there be any expression in his face, it will be a veiled scorn, as who should say, 'Not at home—to you.'

But Edgar was in a mood not to be daunted by the most icy

of menials—a Warwickshire bumpkin two years ago, but steeped to the lips in the languid insolence of May Fair to-day.

'Is Miss Daphne Lawford at home?' he asked.

The footman believed, with supreme indifference, as if the presence or absence of a younger daughter who was not an heiress were a question he could hardly stoop to contemplate, that Miss Daphne Lawford might possibly be found upon the premises; and he further condescended to impart the information that Miss Lawford had driven to the Abbey with Mrs. Ferrers and Mr. Goring to see the improvements.

'I'll go and find her for myself,' said Edgar, too eager to wait for forms and ceremonies; 'I daresay she is in the morning-room.'

He passed the servant, and went straight to the pretty room where he had been so much at home for the last ten years. There were no lamps or candles; Daphne was sitting alone in the firelight, in one of those low roomy chairs which modern upholsterers delight in—sitting alone, with neither book nor work, and Fluff, the Maltese terrier, curled up in her lap.

Her eyelids were lowered, and Edgar approached her softly, thinking she was asleep; but at the sound of his footfall she looked up, gently, gravely, without any surprise at his coming.

'I hope that you are better—quite well, in fact; that you have entirely recovered from your fatigue last night,' he began tenderly.

'I am quite well,' she answered almost angrily, and blushing crimson with vexation. 'Pray don't make a fuss about it. Waltzing so long made me giddy. That was all.'

Her snappish tone was a cruel change after her sweetness last night. Edgar's heart sank very low at this unexpected rebuff.

'You are all alone,' he said feebly.

'Unless you count Fluff and the squirrel, yes. But they are very good company,' answered Daphne, brightening a little, and smiling at him with that provoking kindness, that easy friendliness, which always chilled his soul.

It was so hopelessly unlike the feeling he wished to awaken.

'Madoline drove to the Abbey with Aunt Rhoda and Mr. Goring directly after luncheon. The new hot-houses are finished, I believe, at last. I have been horribly lazy. I only came down an hour ago.'

'I am glad you were able to sleep,' said Edgar. 'It was more than I could do.'

'I suppose nobody ever does sleep much after a ball,' answered Daphne. 'The music goes on repeating itself over and over again in one's brain, and one goes spinning round in a perpetual imaginary waltz. I was thinking all last night of Don Ramiro and Donna Clara.

'Friends of yours?' inquired Edgar.

Daphne's eyes sparkled at the question, but she did not laugh. She only looked at him with a compassionate smile.

'You have never read Heine?'

'Never. Is it interesting?'

'Heinrich Heine? He was a German poet, don't you know. As great a poet, almost, as Byron.'

'Unhappily I don't read German.'

'Oh, but some of his poetry has been translated. The translations are not much like the original, but still they are something.'

'And who is Don—Ra——what's-his-name?' inquired Edgar, still very much in the dark.

'The hero of a ballad—an awful, ghastly, ghostly ballad, ever so much ghastlier than Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene, and the worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out, don't you know. He is dead, and she has jilted him, and married somebody else: and he has promised her on the eve of her wedding that he will come to the wedding feast: and he comes and waltzes with her, and she doesn't know that he is dead, and she reproaches him for wearing a black cloak at her bridal, and she asks him why his cheeks are snow-white and his hands ice-cold, and they go on whirling round all the time, the trumpets blowing and the drums beating, and to all she says he gives the same answer:

"Said I not that I would come?"

That awful ballad was in my mind all night, and when I did at last fall asleep, I dreamt I was at the ball again, and instead of Stratford Town Hall we were in an old Gothic palace at Toledo and—and—the person I was dancing with was Don Ramiro. His white dead face looked down at me, and all the people vanished, and we were dancing alone in the dark cold hall.'

She shuddered at the recollection of her dream, clasping her hands before her face, as if to shut out some hideous sight.

'You ought not to read such poetry,' said Edgar, deeply concerned. 'How can people let you have such books?'

'Oh, there is no harm in the book. You know I adore poetry. Directly I was able to write a German exercise, I got hold of Heine, and began to spell out his verses. They are so sweet, so mournful, so full of a patient despair.'

'You have too much imagination,' said Edgar. 'You ought to read sober solid prose.'

'"Blair's Lectures," "Sturm's Reflections," "Locke on the Understanding,"' retorted Daphne, laughing. 'No; I like books that take me out of myself and into another world.'

'But if they only take you into charnel-houses, among ghosts and dead people, I don't see the advantage of that.'

'Don't you? There are times when anything is better than one's own thoughts.'

'Why should you shrink from thought?' asked Edgar tenderly. 'You can have nothing painful to remember or think about; unless,' he added, seeing an opening, 'you feel remorseful for having been so cruel to me.'

He had drawn his chair close to hers in the firelight—the ruddy, comfortable light which folded them round like a rosy cloud. She sat far back in her downy nest, almost buried in its soft depths, her eyes gazing dreamily at the fire, her sunny hair glittering in the fitful light. If she had been looking him full in the face, in broad day, Edgar Turchill could hardly have been so bold.

'I did feel very sorry, last night, when you were so good to me,' she said slowly.

'Good to you! Why, I did nothing!'

'You are so loyal and good. I saw it all last night, as if your heart had suddenly been spread open before me like a book. I think I read you plainly last night for the first time. You are faithful and true; a gentleman to the core of your heart. All men ought to be like that: but they are not.'

'You can have had very little experience of their shortcomings,' said Edgar, his heart glowing at her praise. And then, emboldened, and yet full of fear, he hastened to take advantage of her humour. 'If you can trust me; if you think me in the slightest measure worthy of these sweet words, which might be a much better man's crown of bliss, why will you not make me completely happy? I love you so truly, so dearly, that, if to have an honest man for your slave can help to make your life pleasant, you had better take me. I know that I am not worthy of you, that you are as high above me in intellect, and grace, and beauty, as the stars are in their mystery and splendour; but a more brilliant man might not be quite so ready to mould himself according to your will, to sink his own identity in yours, to be your very slave, in fact; to have no purpose except to obey you.'

'Don't!' cried Daphne. 'If you were my husband, I should like you to make me obey. I am not such a fool as to want a slave.'

'Let me be your husband; we can settle afterwards who shall obey,' pleaded Edgar, leaning with folded arms upon the broad elbow of her chair, trying to get as near her as her entrenched position would allow.

'I like you very much. After Madoline there is no one I like better,' faltered Daphne; 'but I am not the least little bit in love with you. I suppose it is wrong to be so candid; but I want you to know the truth.'

'If you like me well enough to marry me, I am content.'

'Really and truly? Content to accept liking instead of love; confidence and frank straightforward friendship instead of sentiment or romance?'

'I do not care a straw for romance. And to be liked and trusted——well, that is something. So long as there is no one else you have ever liked better——'

The face turned towards the fire quivered with the passing of a strong emotion, but Edgar could only see the thick ripples of golden hair making a wavy line above the delicate ear, and the perfect outline of the throat, rising out of its soft lace ruffle like the stem of a lily from among its leaves.

'Who else is there for me to like?' she asked with a faint laugh.

'Then, dearest, I would rather have your liking than any other woman's love: and it shall go hard with me if liking do not grow to love before our lives are ended,' said Edgar, clasping the hand that lay inhert upon Fluff's silky back.

The Maltese resented the liberty by an ineffectual snap.

'Please, don't—don't think it quite settled yet,' cried Daphne, scared by this hand-clasp, which seemed like taking possession of her. 'You must give me time to breathe—time to think. I want to be worthy of you, if I can—if—if—I am ever to be your wife. I want to be loyal—and honest—as you are.'

'Only say that you will be my wife. I can trust you with the rest of my fate.'

'Give me a few days—a few hours, at least—to consider.'

'But why not to-day? Let it be to-day,' he pleaded passionately.

'You must give me a little while,' answered Daphne, smiling faintly at his impatience, which seemed to her something childish, she not being touched by the same passion, or inspired by the same hope, being, as it were, outside the circle of his thoughts. 'If—if—you are very anxious to be answered—let it be to-day.'

'Bless you, darling!'

'But don't be grateful in advance. The answer may be No.'

'It must not. You would not break my heart a second time.'

'Ah, then you contrived to mend it after the first breakage,' retorted Daphne, laughing with something of her old mirth. 'Madoline broke it first, and you patched it together and made quite a good job of it, and then offered it to me. Well, if you really wish it, you shall have your answer to-night. I must speak to Lina first.'

'I know she will be on my side.'

'Tremendously. You will dine here, of course. And I suppose you will go away at about eleven o'clock. You know the window of my room?'

'Know it!' cried Edgar, who had lingered to gaze at that particular casement under every condition of sky and temperature. 'Know it? Did Romeo know Juliet's balcony?'

'Well, then, at ten minutes past eleven look up at my window. If the answer be No, the shutters will be shut, and all dark; if the answer be Yes, the lamp shall be in the window.'

'Oh, blessed light. I know the lamp will be there.'

'And now no more of this nonsense,' said Daphne imperatively. 'I am going to give you some tea.'

'Put a dose of poison in it, and finish me off straight, if the lamp is not going to shine in your window.'

'Absurd man! Do you suppose I know any more than you what the answer is to be? We are the sport of Fate.'

The door was opened gently, as if it had been the entrance to a sick man's chamber, and the well-drilled footman brought in a little folding table, and then a tea-tray, an intensely new-fashioned old-fashioned oval oaken tray, with a silver railing, and oriental cups and saucers *à la Belinda*—everything strictly of the hoop-and-patch period. These frivolities of tray and tea-things were one of Mr. Goring's latest gifts to his mistress.

Not another tender word would Daphne allow from her lover. She talked of the people at the ball, asked for details about everybody—the girl in the pink frock; the matron with hardly any frock at all; the hunting men and squires of high degree. She kept Edgar so fully employed answering her questions that he had no time to edge in an amorous speech, though his whole being was breathing love.

Madoline and Gerald Goring came in and found them *tête-à-tête* by the fire. They had made a *détour* on their way home, and had deposited Mrs. Ferrers at the Rectory. It was the first time Gerald had seen Daphne since the ball.

'Better?' he inquired, with a friendly nod.

'Quite well, thanks. I have not been ill,' she answered curtly.

Mr. Goring seated himself in a shadowy corner, remote from the little group by the tea-table.

'Shall I ring for more tea, or have you had some at the Abbey?' asked Daphne, with a businesslike air.

'We had tea in Lady Geraldine's room,' answered Madoline. 'I wish you had been with us, Daphne. It is such a lovely room in the firelight. The houses are all finished, and Cormack has filled three of them already. Such lovely flowers! I can't imagine where he has found them.'

'Easy to do that kind of thing when one has a floating balance of fifty thousand or so at one's bankers,' answered Edgar cheerily. 'My wife will have to put up with a few old orange-trees that have been at Hawksyard for a century.'

The tone in which he uttered those two words 'my wife,'

startled Gerald out of his reverie. There was a world of suppressed delight and triumph in the utterance.

'He has been asking her to marry him, and she has relented, and accepted him,' he thought, hardly knowing whether to be glad or angry.

Was it not ever so much better that she should reward this faithful fellow's devotion, and marry, and be happy in the beaten track of life? He had told himself once that she was a creature just a little too bright and lovely for treading beaten tracks, a girl who ought to be the heroine of some romantic history. Yet, are these heroines of romance the happiest among women? Was the young woman who was sewn up in a sack and drowned in the Bosphorus happy, though her fate inspired one of the finest poems that ever was written? Was Sappho particularly blest, or Hero, Heloise, or Juliet? Their fame was the fruit of exceptional disaster, and not of exceptional joy. The Greek was wise who said that the happiest she is the woman who has no history.

Sir Vernon Lawford came in while they were all talking of hot-houses, and asked for a cup of tea, an unusual condescension on his part, and which fluttered Daphne a little as she rang the bell for a fresh teapot.

'Don't trouble yourself, my dear. Give me anything you have there,' he said, more kindly than he was wont to speak. 'So you were too tired to show at luncheon. Your aunt says you danced too much.'

'It was her first ball,' pleaded Madoline.

'Yes; the first, but not likely to be the last. She is launched now, and will have plenty of invitations. A foolish friend of mine told me that Daphne was the belle of the ball.'

'She was,' said Edgar sturdily. 'I saw two old women standing on a rout-seat to look at her.'

'Is that conclusive?' asked Sir Vernon good-humouredly, and with a shrewd glance from Edgar to his fair-haired daughter.

'I think people must have been demented if they wasted a look upon me while Lina was in the room,' said Daphne.

'Oh, but every one knows Lina,' answered her father, pleased at this homage to his beloved elder daughter. 'You are a novelty.'

He was proud of her success, in spite of himself; proud that she should have burst upon his Warwickshire friends like a revelation of hitherto unknown beauty—unknown, at least, since his second wife, in all the witchery of her charms, had turned the heads of the county twenty years ago. That beauty had been a fatal dower—fatal to her, fatal to him—and he had often told himself that Daphne's prettiness was a perilous thing; to be looked at with the eye of fear and suspicion rather than

that of love. And yet he was pleased at her triumph, and inclined to be kinder to her on account thereof.

They seemed a happy family-party at dinner that day. Madoline was full of delight in the improvement of her future home—full of gratitude to her betrothed for the largeness with which he had anticipated her wishes. Edgar was in high spirits; Daphne all gaiety; Sir Vernon unusually open in speech and manner. If Gerald was more silent than the others, nobody noticed his reserve. He had been quiet all day, and when Madoline had questioned him as to the cause, had owned to not being particularly well.

Later in the evening they all adjourned to the billiard-room, with the exception of Daphne, who pleaded a headache, and bade every one good-night; but about an hour afterwards, upon the stroke of eleven, Madoline, who had just gone up to her room, was startled by a knock at her door, and then by the apparition of Daphne in her long white dressing-gown.

'My pet, I thought you went to bed an hour ago.'

'No, dear. I had a headache, but I was not sleepy.'

'My poor darling; you are so pale and heavy-eyed. Come to the fire.'

Madoline wanted to instal her in one of the cosy arm-chairs by the hearth, but Daphne slipped to her favourite seat on the fleecy white rug at her sister's feet.

'No, dear; like this,' she said, looking up at Madoline with tearful eyes; 'at your feet—always at your feet; so much lower than you in all things—so little worthy of your love.'

'Daphne, it offends me to hear you talk like that. You are all that is sweet and dear. You and I are equal in all things, except fortune: and it shall not be my fault if we are not made equal in that.'

'Fortune!' echoed Daphne drearily. 'Oh, if you but knew how little I value that. It is your goodness I revere—your purity, your—'

She burst into tears, and sobbed passionately, with her face hidden on her sister's knee.

'Daphne, what has happened—what has grieved you so? Tell me, darling; trust me.'

'It is nothing; mere foolishness of mine.'

'You have something to tell me, I know.'

'Yes,' answered Daphne, drying her tears hastily and looking up with a grave set face. 'I have come to ask your advice. I mean to abide by your decision, whichever way it may fall. Edgar wants me to marry him, and I have promised him an answer to-night. Shall it be "Yes" or "No?"'

'Yes, of course, my pet, if you love him.'

'But I don't; not the least atom. I have told him so in the very plainest straightest words I could find. But he still wishes

me to be Mrs. Turchill; and he seems to think that when I have been married to him twenty years or so I shall get really attached to him—as Mrs. John Anderson, my Jo, did, don't you know? She may have cared very little for Mr. Anderson at the outset.'

'Oh, Daphne,' sighed Madoline, with a distressed look, 'this is very puzzling. I don't know what to say. I like Edgar so much—I value him so highly—and I should dearly like you to marry him.'

'You would!' cried Daphne decisively. 'Then that settles it. I shall marry him.'

'But you don't care for him.'

'I care for you. I would do anything in this world—yes,' with sudden energy, 'the most difficult thing, were it at the cost of my life—to make you happy. Would it make you happy for me to marry Edgar?'

'I believe it would.'

'Then I'll do it. Hark! there's the outer door shutting,' cried Daphne, as the hall-door closed with a hollow reverberation. 'Edgar will be under my window in a minute or two. I'll run and give him my answer.'

'What do you mean?'

'A lamp in my window is to signify Yes.'

'Go and put the lamp there, darling. May it be a star for you both, shining upon the beginning of a bright happy life!'

A few minutes later Edgar, standing in the shrubbery walk, with his eyes fixed on Daphne's casement, the owner of them unconscious of winter's cold, saw the bright spot of light stream out upon the darkness, and knew that he was to be blest. He went home like a man in a happy dream, scarce knowing by what paths he went; and it is a mercy he did not walk into the Avon and incontinently drown himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

'FOR I WOL GLADLY YELDEN HIRE MY PLACE.'

Edgar Turchill rode over to South Hill directly after breakfast next morning. It was a hunting-day, and the meet was at a favourite spot; but he had business to do which could brook no delay, and even the delight of skimming across the Vale of the Red Horse, on a hunter well able to carry him, must give way to the more vital matter which called him to the house on the hill. So soon as Sir Vernon Lawford might be fairly supposed to be accessible to a visitor, Mr. Turchill presented himself, and asked for an interview.

He was ushered straight to Sir Vernon's study, that sacred, and in a manner official chamber, which he had ever held in awe;

a room in which the driest possible books, in the richest possible bindings, repelled the inquiring mind of an ordinary student, who, looking for Waverley, found himself confronted with Blackstone, or exploring for Byron, found himself face to face with Coke or Chitty.

Here, Sir Vernon, seated reposefully in his great red morocco armchair, listened courteously to Edgar's relation of his love, and his hope that, subject to parental approval, his constancy might speedily be rewarded. 'I have heard something of this before,' said Sir Vernon. 'My sister told me you had proposed to Daphne, and had been rejected. I was sorry the child had not better taste; for I like you very much, Turchill, as I believe you know.'

'You have been very good to me,' answered Edgar, reddening with the honest warmth of his feelings. 'South Hill has been my second home. The happiest hours of my life have been spent here. Yes, Sir Vernon, Daphne certainly did refuse me in the summer; but I felt that it was my own fault. I spoke too soon. I ought to have bided my time. And last night, after the ball, I spoke again, and—'

'With a happier result,' said Sir Vernon. 'But Daphne is little more than a child—no wiser than a child in her whims and fancies. I should not like a straightforward fellow like you to suffer from a school-girl's frivolity. Do you think she knows her own mind now any better than she did in the summer, when she gave you quite a different answer? Are you sure that she is in earnest—that she is as fond of you as you are of her?'

'I have no hope of that,' answered Edgar, a little despondently. 'I have been loving her ever since she came home, and my love has grown stronger with every day of my life. If she likes me well enough to marry me, I am content.'

Sir Vernon remained silent for some moments, gravely contemplating the fire, as if he were reading somebody's history in it, and that a gloomy one.

'I am fond enough of you to be sorry you should marry on such conditions,' he answered, after a longish pause. 'My younger daughter is a very pretty girl—people persecuted me with compliments about her the other night—and, I suppose, a very fascinating girl; but if she does not honestly and sincerely return your love, I say, Do not marry her. Pluck her out of your heart, Edgar, as you would a poisonous weed. Be sure, if you don't, the poison will rankle there by-and-by, and develop its venom at the time you are least prepared for it.'

Edgar, secure in his assurance of future happiness—for what man, having won Daphne, could fail to be happy?—smiled at the unwonted energy of Sir Vernon's address.

'My dear sir, you take this matter too seriously,' he replied.

'I have no fear of the issue. Daphne's heart is free, and it will be very hard if I cannot make myself owner of it, loving her as I do, and having her promise to marry me. I only want to be assured of your approval.'

'That you have with all heartiness, my dear boy. But I should like to be sure that Daphne is worthy of you.'

'Worthy of me!' echoed Edgar, with a tender smile; 'I wish to Heaven I were worthy of her.'

'She is very young,' said Sir Vernon thoughtfully.

'Nineteen on her next birthday.'

'But that birthday is nearly a year off. I hope you will not be in a hurry to be married.'

'I shall defer that to your judgment; though I think, as I can never feel warmly interested in Hawksyard till I have a wife there, the sooner we are married, so far as my happiness is concerned, the better.'

'Of course. You young men have always some all-sufficient reason for being over the border with the lady. How will your mother relish the change?'

Poor Edgar winced at the question, feeling very sure that Mrs. Turchill would take the event as her death-blow.

'My mother is perfectly independent,' he faltered. 'She has her jointure.'

'Has she not Hawksyard for her life?'

'No; the estate was strictly entailed. I am sole master there.'

'I am glad of that,' said Sir Vernon. 'It is an interesting old place.'

'Daphne likes it,' murmured Edgar fatuously.

'I suppose you know that I can give my younger daughter no fortune?'

'If you could give her a million, it would not make me one whit better pleased at winning her.'

'I believe you, Edgar,' answered Sir Vernon. 'When a man of your mould is in love, filthy lucre has very little weight with him. There will be a residue, I have no doubt, when I am gone—a few thousands; but the bulk of my property was settled when I married Lina's mother. I suppose you know that Lina is very pleased at the idea of having you for a brother-in-law?'

'I know nothing, except that Daphne has consented to be my wife.'

'Lina announced the fact to me this morning at breakfast. Daphne was not down—a headache—a little natural shyness, I daresay. Lina is very glad—very much your friend.'

'She has always been that,' faltered Edgar, looking back with half-incredulous wonder to the time when a word from

Lina had been enough to stir the pulses of his heart, when the mention of her name was music.

'I think I cannot do better for you than leave your happiness in Lina's care,' said Sir Vernon. 'Daphne will not be married first, of course.'

'Might they not be married on the same day?' suggested Edgar. 'Lina is to be married directly she comes of age, is she not?'

'That has been proposed,' said Sir Vernon reluctantly, 'but I am in no hurry to lose my daughter, and I don't think Lina is eager to leave me. In my precarious state of health it will be hard for me to bear the pain of parting.'

'But, my dear Sir Vernon, she will be so near you—quite close at hand,' remonstrated Edgar, inwardly revolting against this selfishness, which would delay his own happiness as well as Goring's.

'Don't talk about it, Turchill,' exclaimed Sir Vernon testily. 'You don't understand—you can't enter into my feelings. My daughter is all the world to me now. What will she be when she is a wife, a mother, with a hundred different interests and anxieties plucking at her heart-strings? Why, I daresay a teething-baby would be more to her than her father, if I were on my death-bed.'

'Indeed, Sir Vernon, you wrong her.'

'I daresay I do. But I am devoured with jealousy when I think of her belonging to anyone else. It is the penalty she pays for having been perfect as a daughter. Our virtues, as well as our vices, are often scourges for our own backs. However, when the time comes I must bear the blow with a smiling countenance, that she may never know how hard I am hit. Only you can imagine I don't want to hasten the evil hour. And now, as I think we understand each other, you may be off to pleasanter society than mine.'

Edgar instantly availed himself of this permission, and hastened to the morning-room, where Madoline was seated at her work-table, while Daphne twisted herself round and round on the music-stool, now talking to her sister, now playing a few bars of one of Schumann's '*Kinderstücken*,' anon picking out a popular melody she had heard the faithful Bink whistle as he weeded his flower-beds.

She started a little at Edgar's entrance, and 'blushed celestial red, love's proper hue,' much to the delight of her lover, who hung out a rosy flag on his own side, and looked as shy as any school-girl.

He shook hands with Madoline, and then went straight to the piano, and tried by a tender pressure of Daphne's hand to express something of the rapture that was flooding his soul.

'I have seen your father, dearest,' he said in her ear, as she

went on lightly playing little bits of Schumann. 'He thoroughly approves—he is glad.'

'Then I am glad if he is glad, and you are glad, and Madoline is glad,' answered Daphne, with a smile in which there was a subtle mockery that escaped Edgar's perception. 'What can I do better than please everybody?'

'You have made me the happiest man in creation.'

'Does not every young man say that when he is engaged?' asked Daphne laughingly. 'I believe it is a formula. And when he has been married a year the happiest man in creation takes to quarrelling with his wife. However, I hope we may not quarrel. I will try to be as good to you as you have been to me; and that is saying a good deal.'

They lingered by the piano, Edgar pouring forth vague expressions of his delight, his gratitude, his intoxication of bliss. Daphne playing a little, and listening a little, with her eyes always on the keys, offering her lover only the lashes, dark brown with sparks of gold upon their tips, for his contemplation. But such lashes, and such eyelids, and such a lovely droop of the small classic head, were enough to satisfy a lover's eye for longer than Edgar was required to look at them.

By-and-by, when he had exhausted a lover's capacity for talking nonsense, he made a sudden dash at the practical.

'I want you to come and see my mother, Daphne.'

'Have you told her?'

'No, not yet. There has been no opportunity, you know.'

This was hardly true, since, seated opposite Mrs. Turchill at the breakfast-table that morning, Edgar had vainly endeavoured to frame the sentence which should announce his bliss, and had found an awkwardness in the revelation which required to be surmounted at more leisure.

'I am going to tell her directly I go home. It was better to see Sir Vernon first, don't you know. And I want you and Madoline to come over to tea this afternoon. You could drive over to Hawksyard with Daphne after luncheon, couldn't you, Madoline?' he asked, going over to the work-table. 'It would be so good of you, and would please my mother so very much.'

'Would it?' asked Lina, smiling up at him. 'Then it shall be done.'

The young man lingered as long as he could, consistently with his performance of that duty which he felt must not be deferred beyond luncheon time. It was hardly a good time to choose for the revelation, for Mrs. Turchill was apt to be somewhat disturbed in her temper at the mid-day meal; her patience having been exercised by sundry defalcations discovered in her morning round of the house. It might be that new milk had been given away to unauthorised recipients, or to pensioners who were only entitled to receive skimmed milk; it might be

an unexplainable evanishment of home-brewed beer: or that the principal oak staircase was not so slippery as it ought to be; or that the famous pewter dinner-service was tarnished; or a favourite fender displayed spots of rust; but there was generally something, some feather-weight of domestic care which disturbed the even balance of Mrs. Turchill's mind at this hour. Like those modern scales which can be turned by an infinitesimal portion of a human hair, so the fine balance of Mrs. Turchill's temper required but very little to alter it.

Edgar rode home to Hawksyard in the clear bright winter noontide, feeling as much like a convicted criminal as a young man of pure mind and clear conscience well could feel. He went bustling into the dining-room, rubbing his hands, and making a great pretence of cheeriness. His mother was standing on the hearth-rug knitting a useful brown winter sock—for him, he knew. Those active knitting-needles of hers were always at work for him. He felt himself an ingrate, as he thought of her labour.

'Well, mother; lovely weather, isn't it, so wintry and seasonable? I hope you have had a pleasant morning.'

'About as pleasant as I can have in a nest of vipers,' answered Mrs. Turchill, frowning at her work, and intent upon turning a heel.

'What's up now?' asked Edgar, nothing startled by the vigour of her speech.

'The beer consumed at Christmas—I won't say drunk, for gallons of it must have been given away—is something too dreadful to contemplate,' replied Mrs. Turchill.

'Never mind the beer, mother,' answered Edgar, still rubbing his hands before the fire, and shifting from one foot to another in a manner that indicated a certain perturbation of spirit; 'Christmas comes only once a year, you know, and the servants ought to enjoy themselves.'

'That's all very well, Edgar, within proper limits; but when I see them stepping over the boundary line——'

'You feel that it's time to put on the drag,' interjected Edgar. 'Of course; very right and proper. Whatever should I do without such a dear prudent mother to look after things?'

And then, suddenly remembering that the most eager desire of his heart at this very moment was to substitute a foolish young wife for this wise and experienced housekeeper, Edgar Turchill became suddenly as vermilion as the most vivid cock's-comb in his mother's poultry-yard. He felt that the revelation he had to make must be blurted out somehow. There was no use in prancing before the fire, making such a serious business of warming his hands.

'I've been over to South Hill this morning, mother,' he said at last, rather jerkily.

'Have you?' said Mrs. Turchill curtly. 'It seems to me you never go anywhere else.'

'Well, I'm afraid that's a true bill,' he answered, laughing with affected heartiness, very much as the timorous traveller whistles in a lonely wood. 'I love the place, and the people who live in it. South Hill has been my second home ever since I was a little bit of a chap at Rugby. But this morning I have been there on very particular business. I have been having a serious talk with Sir Vernon. I wonder if you could guess the subject of our conversation, mother, and spare my blushes in telling it?'

It was Mrs. Turchill's turn to assume the cock's-comb's flaming hue.

'If you have done anything to blush for, Edgar, I am sorry for you,' she observed sternly. 'Your father was one of the most respectable men in Warwickshire, and the most looked-up to, or my father would not have allowed me to marry him.'

'You are taking me a trifle too literally, mother,' answered Edgar, laughing uneasily. 'I hope there is nothing disreputable in a man of my age falling in love and wanting to be married. That's the only crime I have to confess this morning. Yesterday afternoon I asked Daphne to be my wife, and she consented; and this morning I settled it all with Sir Vernon. We are to be married on the same day as Goring and Madoline—at least, Sir Vernon said something to that effect.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Turchill freezingly. 'Indeed! And now Miss Daphne has consented and Sir Vernon has consented, and the very wedding-day is fixed, you do me the honour to inform me. I thank you from my heart, Edgar, for the respect and affection, the consideration and regard, you have shown for me in this matter. I am not likely to forget your conduct.'

'Dearest mother,' gasped Edgar affrightedly, for the icy indignation of his parent's speech and manner went beyond the worst he had feared, 'surely you are not offended—surely——'

'But it is only what I might reasonably have expected,' pursued Mrs. Turchill, ignoring the interruption. 'It is only what I ought to have looked for. When a mother devotes herself day and night to her son; when she studies his welfare and his comfort in everything; when she sits up with him night after night with the measles—quite unnecessarily, as the doctor said at the time—and reduces herself to a shadow when he has the scarlatina; when she worries herself about him every time he gets damp feet, and endures agony every hour of the day while he is out shooting; this is pretty sure to be the result. He is caught by the first pretty face he sees, and his mother becomes a cipher in his estimation.'

'Believe me that is not my case, dear mother,' protested

Edgar, putting his arm round the matron's waist, which she made as inflexible as she possibly could for the occasion, and trying to kiss her, which she would not allow. 'You will never cease to be valued and dear. Do you suppose there is no room in my heart for you and Daphne? I know she is a mere child, a positive baby, to place at the head of a house which you have managed so cleverly all these years; but everything in this life must have a beginning, don't you know, and I rely upon you for teaching Daphne how to manage her house.'

'That kind of thing cannot be taught, Edgar,' answered his mother severely. 'It must be the gradual growth of years in an adaptable mind. I don't believe Daphne Lawford will ever be a housekeeper. It is not in her. You might as well expect a butterfly to sit upon its eggs with the patience of a farm-yard hen. However,' sighed Mrs. Turchill, 'you have chosen for yourself.'

'Did you suppose I should let anyone else choose for me in such a matter, mother?'

'I am sorry for my lovely stock of house-linen. The tea-cloths will get used in the stable; and the kitchen-cloths will be made away with by wholesale.'

'Never mind a few tea-cloths, mother.'

'But it is not a few, it is a great many. I daresay that out of the twelve dozen that are now in the linen-closet you won't have two dozen sound ones a twelvemonth after your marriage.'

'I think I should survive even that loss, mother, if you were happy,' answered Edgar lightly.

'How could I possibly be happy knowing the waste and destruction of things that I have taken so much trouble to get together? I'm sure I feel positively ill at the idea of the best glass and china under the authority of a girl of eighteen; your great-grandmother's Crown Derby dessert-set, which I have often been told is priceless.'

'Yes, mother, by people who don't want to buy it. If you wanted to sell it, you would hear a very different story. However, I don't see any reason why Daphne should not be able to take care of the dessert-plates——'

'I have always kept chamois-leather over each plate,' interrupted Mrs. Turchill, with a pensive shake of her head. 'Will she take as much trouble?'

'Or why there should be waste and destruction anywhere. Daphne will not be the first young wife who ever had to take care of a house, and I know by the way she learnt to row how easy it is to teach her anything.'

'Easy to teach her to row, or to ride, or to play lawn-tennis, or to do anything frivolous and useless, I have no doubt,' retorted his mother; 'but I don't believe it is in her to learn careful ways, and the management of servants. I only hope

the waste and destruction will stop at the house-linen. I only hope she won't bring ruin upon you; but when I think how many a young man of good means has been utterly ruined by an extravagant wife——'

'Upon my word, mother,' protested Edgar, with a dash of resentment, feeling that this was too much, 'you are making a perfect raven of yourself, instead of being cheery and pleasant, as I expected you to be. I'm sorry I have not been able to choose a wife more to your liking as a daughter-in-law; but marriage is one of the few circumstances of life in which selfishness is a duty, and a man must please himself at any hazard of displeasing other people. I don't believe there's a man who was at the Hunt Ball the other night who won't envy me my good luck.'

'Very likely; since men are influenced by mere outside prettiness,' said Mrs. Turchill. 'Though even there Daphne is by no means faultless. Her nose is too short.'

'Now, mother, you have been so good to me all my life that it would be a very unnatural thing if you were to begin to be unkind all at once, and in a crisis of my life in which I most need your love,' pleaded Edgar with genuine feeling.

He put his arm round his mother's waist, which, this time, was less inflexible than before. He turned the matron's face towards his, and, lo! her eyes were full of tears.

'It would be very strange, indeed, if I could deny you anything,' she said, strangling a sob. 'There never was a child so much indulged as you were. If you had cried for the moon, it would have quite worried me that I wasn't able to get it for you.'

'And you would have given me a stable-lantern instead,' answered Edgar, smiling. 'Yes, best of mothers, you have always been indulgent, and you are going to be indulgent now, and you will take Daphne to your heart of hearts, and be as fond of her as if she were that baby-girl you lost, grown up to womanhood.'

'Don't, Edgar, don't!' cried Mrs. Turchill, fairly overcome. 'Her bassinet is in the little oak room. I was looking at it yesterday. I have never got over that loss.'

'You will think she has come back to you some day, when you have a little granddaughter,' said Edgar tenderly.

His mother, once reduced to the pathetic mood, was perfectly tractable. Edgar petted and soothed her; protested somewhat recklessly that the chief desire of Daphne's life was to gain her affection; announced the intended afternoon visit; and obtained his mother's promise of a gracious reception.

When Miss Lawford and her sister arrived at about half-past four the drawing-room wore a hospitable aspect; a huge log burning in the Elizabethan fire-place; flowers of a homely

kind—chrysanthemums and Christmas roses, crocuses and snowdrops—about the rooms; and an old-fashioned silver tea-tray on an old-fashioned sofa-table, nothing of Adam or Chippendale or Queen Anne about it, but a good old ponderous piece of rosewood furniture, almost as heavy as a house.

Mrs. Turchill received her guests with gracious smiles and with a heartiness that took Daphne by surprise. She had made up her mind that she was going to be snubbed, and a dash of timidity gave a new grace to her beauty. She was very grave, and seemed, to Mrs. Turchill's scrutinising eye, to be fully awakened to the responsibilities of her position. Could she but remain in this better frame of mind she might fairly be trusted with the Derby dessert-service and the piled-up treasures of the linen-closet.

Mrs. Turchill made Daphne sit on the sofa by her side while she poured out the tea, and was positively affectionate in her manner.

'You will be making tea in this pot before long,' she said, with a loving glance at the fluted teapot. 'It is not a good pourer. You'll have to learn the knack of holding it exactly in the right position.'

'I hope you are not sorry,' faltered Daphne in a very low voice, meaning about the event generally, not with any special reference to the teapot.

'Well, my dear, I am too truthful a woman to deny that it was a blow,' returned Mrs. Turchill candidly. Edgar had kept out of the way when the sisters arrived, wishing his mother to have Daphne all to herself for a little while. 'I suppose that kind of thing must always be a blow to a mother. "My son's my son till he gets him a wife," you know.'

'I hope Edgar will never be any less your son than he is at this moment,' said Daphne. 'I should not like him so well as I do if thought his regard for me could make him one shade less devoted to you.'

'Well, my dear, time will show,' replied Mrs. Turchill doubtfully. 'As a rule young wives are very selfish; they expect to monopolise their husbands' affection. All I hope is that you love Edgar as he deserves to be loved. There never was a worthier young man, and no girl could hope for a better husband than he will make.'

To this exhortation Daphne replied nothing. She sat with downcast eyes, stirring her tea; and Mrs. Turchill, taking this silence for maidenly reserve, transferred her attentions to Madoline.

'I am so sorry Mr. Goring did not drive over with you,' she said. 'I quite expected him.'

'You are very kind,' answered Lina. 'He has gone to London. I had a telegram from Euston Station an hour ago.

Gerald has some business to settle with his London lawyers, and is likely to be away for some days.'

'I'm afraid you must find South Hill very dull in his absence,' suggested Mrs. Turchill politely.

'I miss him very much; but I don't think I am very dull. My father occupies a good deal of my time; and then there is Daphne, who has generally plenty to say for herself.'

'Meaning that I am an insatiable chatterer,' said Daphne, laughing. 'I'm afraid it was Dibb—I mean Martha, an old schoolfellow of mine—who got me into the habit of talking so much.'

'Was she a great talker?'

'Quite the contrary. She rarely opened her mouth except to put something into it, so I acquired the pernicious habit of talking for two.'

Edgar now came in, and seeing Daphne and his mother seated side by side upon the sofa, felt himself exalted to the seventh heaven of tranquil joy. This and this only was needed to fill his cup of bliss: that his mother should be content, that life should flow on smoothly in the old grooves.

'Well, Daphne, how do you like the look of Hawksyard in the winter?'

'I think it is quite the nicest old place in the world. I haven't seen much of the world; but I can't imagine a more interesting old house.'

'You will like it better and better as you become acquainted with it,' said Mrs. Turchill. 'It is one of the most convenient houses I ever saw, and I have seen a good many in my time. My husband's mother was a capital housekeeper, and she did not rest till she had made the domestic arrangements as near perfection as was possible in her time. I have tried to follow in her footsteps.'

'And to make perfection still more perfect,' said Edgar.

'There are modern inventions and improvements, Edgar, which your grandmother knew nothing about. Not that I hold with them all. If you are not tied for time,' added Mrs. Turchill, addressing herself to the two young ladies, 'I should very much like to show Daphne the domestic offices. It would give her an idea of what she will have to deal with by-and-by.'

Daphne, who knew about as much as a butterfly knows of the management of a house, smiled faintly but said nothing. She had come to Hawksyard determined to make herself pleasing to Mrs. Turchill, if it were possible, for Edgar's sake.

'I ventured to tell them to take out the horses,' said Edgar, 'knowing that you don't dine till eight.'

'I shall be pleased to stay as long as Mrs. Turchill likes,' answered Madoline; whereupon the matron, acknowledging this speech with a gracious bend, rose from her sofa, took her key-

basket from the table, and led the way to the corridor in which opened those china and linen stores which were the supreme delight of her soul.

Swelling with pride and the consciousness of duty done, she displayed and descanted on her treasures and the convenient arrangement thereof; the old diamond-cut glass; the Bow, the Staffordshire, the Swansea, the Derby cups and saucers, and plates and dishes—crockery bought in the common way of life, and now of inestimable value. She showed her goodly piles of linen and damask, which a Flemish housewife might have envied. She led her guests to the dairy, which in its smaller and humbler way was as neat and dainty and ornamental as Her Majesty's dairy at Frogmore. She talked learnedly of butter-making, cream-cheeses, and the disposal of skim-milk. Daphne wondered to find how large a science was this domestic management of which she knew absolutely nothing.

'A house of this kind requires a great deal of care and a great deal of thought,' said Mrs. Turchill with a solemn air. 'Old servants are a great comfort, but they have their drawbacks, and require to be kept in check. With a young, inexperienced mistress I'm afraid they will be tempted to take many liberties.'

Mrs. Turchill concluded her speech with a gentle sigh, and a regretful glance at Daphne—not an unfriendly look, by any means; but it expressed her foreboding of future ruin for the house of Hawksyard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'AND COME AGEN, BE IT BY DAY OR NIGHT.'

THE next three days passed somewhat slowly at South Hill. Unselfish as Madoline was, even her delight in Daphne's engagement could not altogether compensate for Gerald's absence. Life without him hung heavily. She missed him at all those accustomed hours which they had spent together. In the bright noontide, when he rode over fresh and full of vivacity after a late breakfast; in the afternoon dusk, when they had been wont to waste time so pleasantly beside the low wood fire; in the evening; always. He had been away for three days, and she had received only one shabby little letter—just a few feeble sentences explaining that he had been obliged to run up to London at an hour's notice to see his lawyers upon some dry-as-dust business relating to his Stock Exchange investments. He hoped to settle it all speedily, and come back to Warwickshire. The letter gave her very little comfort.

'I am afraid he is being worried,' she said to Daphne, after

she had read this brief communication two or three times over. 'It is not like one of his letters.'

The week after the ball began with one of those dull Sundays which come down upon country life like an atmosphere of gloom, and seem to blot out all the pleasantness of creation. A drizzling Scotch-misty Sabbath, painfully suggestive of Glasgow and the Free Kirk. Madoline and Daphne walked to church, waterproofed to the eyes, and assisted sadly at a damp service; the whole congregation smelling of macintoshes; the drip drip from umbrellas on the encaustic pavement audible in the pauses of the Liturgy. It was a rule at South Hill that horses and coachmen should rest on the seventh day, save under direst pressure. Neither of the sisters objected to a wet walk. Edgar met them at church, having tramped over through mud and rain, much to the disgust of his mother, who deemed that to be absent from one's parish church on a Sunday morning was a social misdemeanour not to be atoned for by the most fervent worship in a strange tabernacle. He joined Lina and her sister in the porch, and walked home with them by moist fields and a swollen Avon, whose fringe of willows never looked more funereal than on this dull wintry noontide, when the scant bare shoots stood straight up against a sky of level gray.

'Any news from Goring?' asked Edgar, by way of making himself agreeable.

'Not since I saw you last. I fancy he must be very busy. He is usually such a good correspondent.'

'Busy!' cried Edgar, laughing heartily at the idea. 'What can he have to be busy about?—unless it's the fit of a new suit of clothes, or some original idea in shooting-boots which he wants carried out, or the choice of a new horse; but, for that matter, I believe he doesn't seriously care what he rides. Busy, indeed! He can't know what work means. His bread was buttered for him on both sides, before he was born.'

'Isn't that rather a juvenile notion of yours, Edgar?' asked Madoline. 'I believe the richest people are often the busiest. Property has its duties as well as its rights.'

'No doubt. But a rich man can always take the rights for his own share, and pay somebody else to perform the duties,' answered Edgar shrewdly. 'And I should think Goring was about the last man to let his property be a source of care to him.'

'In this instance I am afraid he is being worried about it,' said Lina decisively; and with a look which seemed to say, 'nobody has any right to have an opinion about my lover.'

The day was a long one, even with the assistance of Edgar in the task of getting through it. Daphne, considerably sobered by her engagement, behaved irreproachably all the afternoon and evening; but she stifled a good many yawns, until the effort made her eyes water.

Her father had been unusually kind to her since the announcement of her betrothal. All his anxieties about her—and it had been the habit of his mind to regard her as a source of trouble and difficulty, or even of future woe—were now set at rest. Married in the early bloom of her girlhood to such a man as Edgar, all her life to come would be so fenced round and protected, so sheltered and guarded by love and honour, that perversity itself could scarce go astray.

'Daphne's mother was spoiled before I married her,' he told himself, remembering the misery of his second marriage. 'If I had won her before her heart was corrupted our lives might have been different.'

It seemed to him, looking at the matter soberly, that there could be no better alliance for his younger daughter than this with Edgar Turchill. He had seen them together continually, in a companionship which seemed full of pleasure for both: boating together, at lawn-tennis, at billiards, sympathising, as it appeared to him from his superficial point of view, in every thought and feeling. It never occurred to him that this was a mere surface sympathy, and that the hidden deeps of Daphne's mind and soul were far beyond the plummet-line of Edgar's sympathy or comprehension. Sir Vernon had made up his mind that his younger daughter was a frivolous butterfly-being, who needed only frivolous pleasures and girlish amusements to make her happy.

Everybody, or almost everybody, approved of Daphne's engagement. It was pleasant to the girl to live for a little while in an atmosphere of praise. Even Aunt Rhoda, upon whose being Daphne had exercised the kind of influence which some people feel when there is a cat in the room, even Aunt Rhoda professed herself delighted. She came over between the showers and the church services upon this particular Sunday, on purpose to tell Daphne how very heartily she approved of her conduct.

'You have acted wisely for once in your life,' she said sententiously; 'I hope it is the beginning of many wise acts. I suppose you will be married at the same time as Lina. The double wedding will have a very brilliant effect, and will save your father ever so much trouble and expense.'

'Oh no; I should not like that,' cried Daphne hurriedly.

'You wouldn't like a double wedding!' ejaculated Mrs. Ferrers indignantly. 'Why, what a vain, arrogant little person you must be. I suppose you fancy your own importance would be lessened if you were married at the same time as your elder sister?'

'No, no, Aunt; indeed, it is not that. I am quite content to seem of no account beside Lina. I love her far too dearly to envy her superiority. But—if—when—I am married I should like it to be very quietly—no people looking on—no fuss—no

fine gowns. When my father and Edgar have made up their minds that the proper time has come, I should like just to walk into my uncle's church early some morning, with papa and Lina, and for Edgar to meet us there, just as quietly as if we were poor people, and for no one to be told anything about it.'

'What a romantic schoolgirlish notion!' said Mrs. Ferrers contemptuously. 'Such a marriage would be a discredit to your family; and I should think it most unlikely my brother would ever give his consent to such a hole-and-corner way of doing things.'

The one person at South Hill who absolutely refused to smile upon Daphne's engagement was Madoline's faithful Mowser. That devoted female received the announcement with shrugs and ominous shakings of a head which carried itself as if it were the living temple of wisdom, and in a manner incomplete without that helmet of Minerva which obviously of right belonged to it.

'You don't seem as pleased as the rest of us at the notion of this second marriage,' said good-tempered Mrs. Spicer, housekeeper and cook, to whom 'the family' was the central point of the universe; sun, moon, and stars, earth and ocean, and the residue of mankind, being merely so much furniture created to make 'the family' comfortable.

'I hear and see and say nothing,' answered Mowser, as oracular in most of her utterances as Friar Bacon's brazen head. 'Time will show.'

'Well, all I can say is,' said Jinman, 'that our Miss Daphne is an uncommon pretty girl, and deserves a good husband. She has just that spice of devilry in her which I like in a woman. Your even-tempered girls are too insipid for my taste.'

'I suppose you would have admired the spice of devilry in Miss Daphne's mar,' retorted Mowser venomously, 'which made her run away from her husband.'

'No, Mrs. Mowser; I draw the line at that. A man may want to get rid of his wife, but he don't like her to take the initial'—Mr. Jinman meant initiative—'and bolt. A spice of devilry is all very well, but one doesn't want the entire animal. I like a shake of the grater in my negus, but I don't desire the whole nutmeg. But I do think that it's a low-minded thing to cast up Miss Daphne's mar whenever the young lady's talked about. Every tub must stand on its own bottom.'

'Well, Mr. Jinman,' said Mowser, 'all I hope is, that Miss Daphne will carry through her engagement now she's made it. She's welcome to her own sweetheart, as far as I am concerned, so long as she doesn't hanker after other people's.'

The phrase sounded vague, and neither Mr. Jinman, nor Mrs. Spicer, nor the coachman (who had dropped in to tea and toast and a poached egg or two in the housekeeper's room) had

any clear idea of what Mowser meant, except that it was something ill-natured. On that point there was no room to doubt.

Another week wore on, the second after the ball, and Gerald Goring had not yet returned. He wrote every other day, telling Madoline all he had been doing; the picture-galleries and theatres he had visited, the clubs at which he had dined; yet in all these letters of his, affectionate as they were, there was a tone which sustained in Lina's mind the idea that her lover was in some way troubled or worried. The few words which gave rise to this impression were slight enough; she hardly knew how or why the notion had entered her mind, but it was there, and remained there, and it increased her anxiety for his return to an almost painful degree. While she was expecting him daily and hourly, a much longer letter arrived, which on the first reading almost broke her heart:

'My dear One,—I write in tremendous excitement and flurry of mind to tell you something which I fear may displease you; yet at the very beginning I will disarm your wrath by saying that if you put a veto upon this intention of mine it shall be instantly abandoned. Subject to this, dear love, I am going, in hot haste, to Canada. Don't be startled, Lina. It is no more nowadays than going to Scotland. Men I know go across for the salmon-fishing every autumn, and are absent so short a time that their friends hardly miss them from the beaten tracks at home.

'And now I will tell you what has put this Canadian idea into my head. I have for some time been feeling a little below par—mopish, lymphatic, disinclined for exertion of any kind. My holiday in the Orkneys was a *dolce far niente* business, which did me no real good. I went the other day to a famous doctor in Cavendish Square, a man who puts our prime ministers on their legs when they are inclined to drop, like tired cab horses, under the burden of the public weal. He ausculted me carefully, found me sound in wind and limb, but nerves and muscles alike in need of bracing. "You want change of scene and occupation," he said, "and a climate that will make you exert yourself. Go to Vienna and skate." I daresay this would have been good advice for a man who had never seen Vienna; but as I know that brilliant capital by heart, with all its virtues, and a few of its vices, I rejected it. "Please yourself," said my physician, pocketing his fee; "but I recommend complete change, and the hardest climate you can bear." I do not feel sure that I intended to take his advice, or should have thought any more about it; but I happened to meet Lord Loftus Berwick, the Duke of Bamborough's youngest son, and an old Eton chum of mine, in the smoking-room at the Reform that very evening, and he told me he was just off to Canada, dilated

enthusiastically upon the delights of that wintry region, and the various sports congenial to the month of February. He goes *viâ* New York, Delaware and Hudson Railway to Montreal, thence to Quebec, and from Quebec by the Intercolonial Railway to Rimouski, where he is to charter a small schooner and cross the St. Lawrence to the mouth of the Natashquan River, which river belongs to two particular friends of his, both distinguished comedians, and men of unbounded popularity on each side of the Atlantic. Here Loftus proposes to hunt cariboo, moose, elk, and I don't know what else. But before he puts on his snow shoes, loads his sledges, and harnesses his dogs for those happy hunting-grounds, he is going to revel in the more civilised and sophisticated pleasures of a Canadian winter, curling-clubs, sleigh-rides around the mountain at Montreal, toboggining at the Falls of Montmorenci, near Quebec, and so on. Just the thing for me, thought I—a hard climate, only about eight days' voyage—if my dearest did not object to my being away from my natural place at her feet for five or six weeks. At my hinting a wish to accompany him Loftus became still more enthusiastic, and was eager to have the whole thing settled that moment. And now, love, it is for you to decide. I think the run would do me good; but perish the thought of benefit to me if it must be bought at the price of pain to you. Loftus is going in the Cunard, which leaves Liverpool the day after to-morrow. Telegraph your wishes, and be assured beforehand of obedience from your devoted slave,

'Gerald Goring.'

Madoline's first thoughts were of the pain of being parted from her lover, whose presence had for so long been the sunshine of her days, and so much a part of her life, that she seemed scarcely to live while he was away from her. Existence was reduced to a mere mechanical moving about, and doing duties which had lost all their savour. But these first thoughts, being selfish, were swiftly succeeded in a mind so entirely unselfish by other considerations. If it were for Gerald's good that he should go to the other end of the world, that they should be parted for much longer than the five or six weeks of which he spoke so lightly, it would not have been in Madoline's nature to desire him to forego even a possible advantage. She had fancied sometimes of late that he was occasionally dull and low-spirited; and now this letter explained all. He was out of health. He had been leading too quiet and womanish a life, no doubt, in his willingness to spend his days in her society. He had foregone all those hardy exercises and field sports which are so necessary to a man who has no serious work in life. Madoline's telegram ran thus:

'Go by all means, if you think the change will do you good.

I tremble at the idea of your crossing the sea at this time of the year. Let me see you before you go. If you cannot come here, I will ask my aunt to go to London with me that I may at least bid you good-bye.'

The answer came as quickly as electricity could bring it, and although laconic, was satisfactory: 'I will be with you about five o clock this afternoon.'

'Dear fellow, how little he thinks of the trouble of travelling so many miles to please me,' thought Madoline; and the idea of her lover's affection sustained her against the pain of parting.

'Next year I shall have the right to go wherever he goes,' she told herself.

Daphne heard of the Canadian expedition, but said so little about it that Lina wondered at her coolness.

'I thought you would have been more surprised,' she said.

'Did you? Why, there is really nothing startling or uncommon in the idea,' answered Daphne smilingly. 'This rushing about the world for sport seems the most fashionable thing among young men with plenty of money. The Society Journals are always telling us how Lord This or Sir John That has gone to the Rockies to shoot wild sheep, or to the North Pole for bears, or to Hungary or Wallachia, or the Balkan range. The beaten tracks count for nothing nowadays.'

When the afternoon came, Lina was alone to receive her lover. Daphne had been seized with a dutiful impulse towards her aunt, and had gone to drink tea at the Rectory, with Edgar in attendance upon her.

'Won't you defer your duty-visit till to-morrow, and wish Gerald good-bye?' asked Lina, when Daphne proposed the expedition.

'No, dear; you can do that for me. This is an occasion on which you ought to have him all to yourself. You will have so much to say to each other.'

'If it were mother, she would occupy all the time in begging him to wear flannels, put cork soles in all his boots, and avoid damp beds,' said Edgar laughing. 'Now, Daphne, put on your hat as quick as you can. 'It's a lovely afternoon for a walk across the fields. If this frost continues we shall have skating presently.'

The daylight faded slowly; a bright frosty day, a clear and rosy sunset. Lina sat by the pretty hearth in her morning-room, and exactly as the clock struck five the footman brought in her dainty little tea-tray, set out the table before the fire, and lighted three or four wax-candles in the old Sèvres candelabra on the mantelpiece. Here she and her lover would be secure from the interruption of callers, which they could not be if in the drawing-room.

Five minutes after the hour there came the sound of wheels upon the gravel drive, a loud ring at the bell, and in the next instant the door of the morning-room was opened, and Gerald came in, looking bulkier than usual in his furred travelling coat.

'Dear Gerald, this is so good of you!' said Madoline, rising to welcome him.

'Dearest!' he took both her hands, and stood looking at her in the firelight, with a countenance full of tenderness—a mournful tenderness—as if he were saddened by the thought of parting. 'You are not angry with me for leaving you for a few weeks?'

'Angry, when you are told the change is necessary for your health! How could you think me so selfish? Let me look at you. Yes; you are looking ill—pale and wan. Gerald, you have been ill, seriously ill, perhaps, since you left here, and you would not tell me for fear of alarming me. I am sure that it is so. Your letters were so hurried, so different from——'

'My dear girl, you are mistaken. I told you the exact truth about myself when I owned to feeling mopish and depressed. I have had no actual illness; but I feel that a run across the Atlantic will revive and invigorate me.'

'And it is quite right of you to go, if the voyage is not dangerous in this weather.'

'Dear love, it is no more dangerous than calling a hansom to take one down Regent Street. The hansom may come to grief somehow, or there may be a gale between Liverpool and New York; but there is hardly any safer way a man can dispose of his life than to trust himself to a Cunard steamer.'

'And do you think you will enjoy yourself in Canada?'

'As much as I can enjoy myself anywhere, away from you. According to my friend Loftus, a Canadian winter is the acme of bliss; and if the winter should break up early, we may contrive to get a little run into the Hudson's Bay country, and a glimpse of the Rockies before we come home.'

'That sounds as if you meant to stay rather a long time,' said Lina, with a touch of anxiety.

'Indeed, no, dear. At latest I shall be with you before April is half over. Think what is to happen early in May.'

'My coming of age. It seems so absurd to come of age at twenty-five, when one is almost an old woman.'

'An old woman verily. A girl as fresh in youthful purity as if her cheek still wore the baby-bloom of seventeen summers! But have you forgotten something else that is to happen next May, Lina—our wedding?'

'There has been nothing fixed about that,' faltered Madoline, 'except, perhaps, that it is to be this year. My father has not

said a word as to the actual time, and I know that he wants to keep me as long as he can.'

'And I think you know that I want to have you at the Abbey as soon as I can. I am getting to loathe that big house, for lack of your presence to transform it into a home. We must be married in May, dearest. Remember we have only been waiting for you to come of age, and for all dry-as-dust questions of property to be settled. If we had been Darby the gardener and Joan the dairymaid, we should have been married four years ago, shouldn't we, Lina?'

'I suppose so,' she answered, blushing, and taking refuge in the occupation of pouring out the tea, adjusting the egg-shell cups and saucers, the slender little rat-tailed spoons, all the dainty affectations and quaintnesses of high-art tea-drinking, 'Darby and Joan are always so imprudent.'

'Yes, but they are often happy. They marry foolishly, and perhaps starve a little after marriage; but they wed while the first bloom is on their love. Come, Lina, say that we shall be married early in May.'

'I can promise nothing without my father's consent. My aunt was suggesting that Daphne and I should be married on the same day.'

'Did she?' asked Gerald, his head bent, his hands engaged with his cup and saucer. 'Two victims led to the altar: Iphigenia and Polyxena, and no likelihood of a hind being substituted for either young lady. Don't you think there is a dash of vulgarity in a double wedding: a desire to make the very most of the event, to intensify the parade: two sets of bridesmaids, two displays of presents, two honeymoon departures: all the tawdriness and show and artificiality of a modern wedding exaggerated by duplication?'

'I think that is rather Daphne's idea. She begs that she and Edgar may be married very quietly, without fuss of any kind.'

'I had no idea that Daphne was capable of such wisdom. I thought she would have asked for four-and-twenty bridesmaids,' said Gerald with a cynical laugh.

'She is much more sensible than you have ever given her credit for being,' answered Madoline, a little offended at his tone. 'She has behaved sweetly since her engagement.'

'And—you—think—she—is—happy?'

How slowly he said this, stirring his tea all the while, as if the words were spoken mechanically, his thoughts being wide-away from them.

'Do you suppose I should be satisfied if I were not sure, in my own mind, of her happiness? How can she fail to be happy? She is engaged to a thoroughly good man, who adores her; and if—if she is not quite as deep in love with him as he is with her,

there is no doubt that her affection for him will increase and strengthen every day.'

'Naturally. He will flatter and fool her till—were it only from sheer vanity—she will ultimately find him necessary to her existence. I knew he had only to persevere in order to win her. I told him so last summer.'

'And Edgar is grateful to you for encouraging him when he was inclined to despair. He told me so yesterday. But do not let us talk of Daphne all the time. I want you to tell me about yourself. How good it was of you to come down to say good-bye!

'Could I do less, dearest? Good-byes are always painful, even when the parting is to be of the briefest, as in this case: but from the moment I knew you wished to see me it was my duty to come.'

'Can you stay here to-night?'

'I can stay exactly ten minutes, and no more. I have to catch the half-past six express.'

'You are not going to the Abbey?'

'No. I have written to my steward, and I am such a *roi fainéant* at the best of times that my coming or going makes very little difference. I leave the new hot-houses under your care and governance, subject to MacCloskie, who governs you. All their contents are to be for the separate use and maintenance of your rooms while I am away.'

'I shall be smothered with flowers.'

'May there be never a thorn among them! And now, love, adieu. This time to-morrow I shall be steaming out of the Mersey. I have to see that Dickson has not come to grief in the preparation of my outfit. A man wants a world of strange things for Canada, according to the outfitters. My own love, good-bye!'

'Good-bye, Gerald dearest, best, good-bye. Every wind that blows will make me miserable while you are on the sea. You'll let me know directly you arrive, won't you? You'll put me out of my misery as soon as you can?'

'I'll cable the hour I land.'

'That will be so good of you,' she said, going with him to the door.

How calm and clear the frosty evening looked! how vivid the steely stars up yonder above the feathery tree-tops! how peaceful and happy all the world!

'God bless you, dear one!' said each to each, as they kissed their parting kiss—both hearts so heavy; but one so pure and free from guile; the other so weighed down by secret cares that could not be told.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'AY FLETH THE TIME, IT WOL NO MAN ABIDE.'

NEARLY six months had gone since that wintry parting, when the lovers clasped hands and blessed each other under the sign of Aries; and now it was midsummer, and all the fields were green, and the limes were breaking into blossom, and the hawthorn-flower was dead, and the last of the blue-bells had faded, and all the white orchard-blooms, the tender loveliness of spring, belonged to the past; for the beauty of earth and nature is a thing of perpetual change, so closely allied with death that in every rapture there is the beginning of a regret.

Gerald Goring had returned, not quite so soon as he had promised beside the winter hearth, but in time to offer birthday greetings to Lina, and to assist in those legal preparations and argumentations which preceded the marriage settlement; in this case a formidable document, involving large interests, and full of consideration for children and grandchildren yet unborn; for daughters dying unmarried, or requiring to be dowered for marriage; for sons who might have to make marriage settlements of their own. There was to be a complete family history, put hypothetically, in Miss Lawford's marriage settlement.

Vainly had Lina tried to dower her sister with half, or at least some portion of her own wealth. Daphne obstinately refused to accept any such boon; and Edgar as obstinately sustained her in her determination.

'I won't accept a penny,' said she.

'I don't want a halfpenny with her,' said he; a refusal which Mrs. Turchill considered supreme folly on the part of son and daughter-in-law; for what improvements might have been made at Hawksyard with a few spare thousands, whereas her son's income, though ample for all the needs and comforts of this life, left no margin for building.

'Why should not Daphne have a range of hot-houses like those Mr. Goring has built for her sister?' argued Mrs. Turchill. 'Or why should not you rebuild the stables, which are dreadfully old-fashioned?'

'I would not change the dear old fashion for worlds, mother, now that I have made every sanitary improvement,' answered Edgar; 'least of all would I improve Hawksyard into a modern house with Goring's money.'

'But it is not Mr. Goring's money that is offered; it is Miss Lawford's.'

'That is the same thing. The loss would be his. Don't talk any more about it, mother; Daphne and I have made up our minds.'

This was decisive; for Mrs. Turchill knew that Daphne's

word was Edgar's law. She was reconciled to the idea of the marriage, but in her confidences with Deborah, she could not help talking of her son's attachment as an infatuation.

Gerald had come back considerably improved in health and spirits by his Canadian and Hudson's Bay adventures. He had crossed the Turtle Mountain, and the arid plains beyond, and from the crest of one of the Sweet Grass Hills had seen the rugged and snowy outline of the Rockies, standing out in full relief against the western sky-line. He had shot a bear or two, and had some experience of wolves. He had eaten pemmican, and ridden a woolly horse; he had slept at a Hudson's Bay station, and had passed a night or two, half-frozen and wholly awake, under canvas. Variety and adventure had done him good physically and mentally; and he told himself that of that fever which had tormented him when he left England—a fever of foolish longings and fond regrets, idle thoughts of things that might have been—he was cured wholly. Yet who shall say whether time might not show some resemblance between this cure and that of a dangerous lunatic, who is discharged from Bedlam a sane man, and who cuts his mother's head off with a carving-knife a fortnight after his release?

The double wedding was to take place in October. Nothing could induce Sir Vernon to consent to an earlier date.

'I shall lose my darling soon enough,' he said, ignoring Daphne in his calculations of loss. 'Let me keep her till the end of the summer. Let us spend this one summer together. Who knows that it may not be my last?'

Any wish expressed by her father would have governed Madoline's conduct, and this wish, expressed so stringently, could not be disregarded. Sir Vernon was frequently ailing, in a languid half-hearted way, which looked like hypochondriasis, but might be actual disease, and a part of that organic evil which was never clearly described. His doctor recommended an entire change of scene—Switzerland, the Engadine, if he could make up his mind to travel so far, and to be satisfied with the simpler diet and accommodation of that skyey world. There was a good deal of discussion, and it was ultimately settled that Sir Vernon and his daughters should start for Switzerland at the end of June, and move quietly about there, studying the invalid's pleasure in all things. Sir Vernon set his face against the Engadine, preferring the more civilised shores of Lake Leman, which he knew by heart.

Daphne had never been beyond Fontainbleau, and was enraptured at the idea of seeing snow-clad mountains and strange people. Gerald and Edgar were to be of the party, and they were only to return to England in time for the double wedding. The sisters were to be married on the same day, after all. That had been settled for them arbitrarily by family and friends,

despite Daphne's objection; and Warwickshire people were already beginning to speculate upon the details of the ceremony, and to wonder what dean or bishop would be privileged to tie the knot, assisted by the Rev. Marmaduke Ferrers.

Daphne's conduct since her engagement had been unobjectionable. Nobody could deny her sweetness, or could fail to approve the sobriety which had come over her manners and conversation. Her hot fits and cold fits, her high spirits and low spirits, were all over. She was uniformly amiable and uniformly grave—not taking rapturous pleasure in anything, but seemingly contented with her lot in life, devoted in her affection to her sister, unvaryingly kind to her lover. Edgar was never tired of thanking heaven for the blessedness of his lot. He had remitted his tenants five-and-twenty per cent. of their March rents; not that there was any special need for such indulgence, but because he longed to be generous to somebody, and to disseminate his overflowing joy.

'I shall do the same for you next October, in honour of my marriage,' he said in his speech at the audit dinner; 'and after that I shall want all the money you can pay me, as a family man.'

Madoline, utterly happy in her lover's society, after that interval of severance which had seemed so long and dreary, cared very little where their lives were to be spent, so long as they were to be together. Yet the idea of revisiting Lake Leman—which she had seen and loved seven years ago in a quiet pilgrimage with her father—with Gerald for her attendant and companion, had a certain fascination.

'It is rather like anticipating our honeymoon, is it not, dear?' he asked laughingly. 'But when the honeymoon comes we shall find some new world to explore.'

'Would you like to take me to the Red River?'

'I think that would be a shade too rough, even for your endurance. The Italian lakes, and a winter in Rome, would suit us better. It is all very well for a man to travel in a district where he has to cover his face with a muffler, and head the driving snow, till he is nearly suffocated with his frozen breath, and has to get himself thawed carefully at the first camp-fire; but that kind of experience lasts a long time, and it is pleasing to fall back upon the old habit of luxurious travelling, and to ride in a *coupé* through Mont Cenis or St. Gotthard, and to arrive at one's destination without any large risk of being swallowed whole in a swamp, or burned alive in a prairie fire.'

'I shall delight in seeing Rome with you,' Madoline answered gently.

'I thought you would like it. I really know my Rome. It is a subject I have studied thoroughly, and I shall love playing cicerone for you.'

It was midsummer, a perfect midsummer evening, the placid sky still faintly tinted with rose and amethyst yonder where the sun had just gone down behind the undulating line of willows. The little town of Stratford lay in its valley, folded in a purple cloud, only the slender church spire rising clear and sharp against that tranquil evening sky. Daphne had stolen away from Madoline and Gerald, who were sitting on the terrace, while Edgar, chained to his post in the dining-room by a lengthy monologue upon certain political difficulties, with which Sir Vernon was pleased to favour him, vainly longed for liberty to rejoin his idol. She had put on her hat, and had set out upon a lonely pilgrimage to Stratford. They were all to leave South Hill early to-morrow, and it was Daphne's fancy to bid good-bye to the church which sheltered those ashes it were the worst of sacrilege to disturb.

It was an idle fancy, no doubt, engendered of a mind prone to idle thoughts; but Daphne, having no urgent occupation for her time this evening, fancied she had a right to indulge it.

'I am going for a little walk,' she had told Edgar, as she left the dining-room; 'don't fidget yourself about me.'

From which moment poor Edgar had been in agonies of restlessness, turning an ear deafer than any adder's to Sir Vernon's disquisition upon the critical state of the country, and the utter incapacity of the men in office to deal with such a crisis, and inwardly chafing against every extension of the subject which prolonged the seemingly endless discourse.

'A little walk!' and why, and where, and with whom? Vainly did Edgar's strained gaze explore the distant landscape. From his position at the dinner-table, he could see a fine range of country ten or fifteen miles away; but never a glimpse of terrace or garden by which Daphne must go. And it was the rule of his life to show Sir Vernon the extremity of respect, an almost old-fashioned and Grandisonian reverence. Therefore to cut short that prosy discourse was impossible.

The blessed moment of release came at last. Sir Vernon finished his claret with a sigh, and left nation and ministry to their fate. Edgar hurried to the terrace. Gerald and Madoline were sipping their coffee at a little rustic bamboo table, the Maltese Fluff lying luxuriously in his mistress's silken lap.

'Have you any idea where Daphne has gone?' Edgar asked despairingly.

'No, indeed. I saw her stroll down towards the river. Perhaps she has gone to see her aunt.'

'Thanks, yes, I daresay,' replied Edgar, speeding off towards the Rectory without waiting to consider whether the clue were worth following.

While Mr. Turchill was hastening across the fields at a racing pace, Daphne was seated in her boat, quietly drifting towards

Stratford, along a dreamy twilit river, where every willow had a ghostly look in the evening dimness.

She was full of grave thoughts on this her last night in Warwickshire. It was more than a year—a year and a quarter—since she had come home for good, as the phrase goes, and a year and a quarter makes a large section of a young life. The years are so long in early youth, when the heart and mind live so fast, and every day is a history: so strangely different from the monotonous years of middle age, which glide past unawares, like the level flats seen from a canal-boat, each meadow so like the last that the voyager is unconscious of progress, till he feels the salt breath of Death's ocean creeping across the low marshes of declining life, and knows that his journey is nearly done.

To Daphne that year at South Hill had been a lifetime. How ardently she had felt and thought and suffered within the time; what resolutions made and broken; what fevers of dangerous delight, and dull intervals of remorse; what wild wicked hopes; what black despair! Looking back at the time that was gone and dead, she was inclined to exaggerate its joys, to gloss over its pain.

'At the worst I have been happy with him,' she said, remembering how much of that vanished time had been spent in Gerald Goring's society, 'though he is nothing to me, and never can be anything to me but a man to be shunned; yet we have been happy together, and that is something.'

She remembered some lines of Dryden's which Gerald had quoted in her presence:

> 'To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day.
> Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine,
> The joys I have possessed, in spite of Fate, are mine.'

She had lived her day. There had been moments in the past; moments that had stirred the deeps of her soul with a power as mysterious as the sweep of the angelic wing on Bethsaida's pool; moments when she had fancied herself beloved by him, whom to love was treason. These stood out upon the page of memory in fiery characters, and in their supernal light all the rest of the record seemed dull and dark. There had been hours of unquestioning bliss when she had in no wise reasoned upon her happiness, when she had not asked herself whether she was loved or scorned, but had been happy as the summer insects are among the flowers, vivified by the sunshine, asking nothing but to live and enjoy that glorious warmth and brightness. So at times she had abandoned herself to the delight of his society, whom she had loved from the hour of their first meeting, giving all her heart and mind to him at once, as utterly as Juliet gave hers to Romeo.

She had lived her day. The long vista of to-morrow and to-morrow opened before her joyless gaze, and she could look down the tranquil path it was her fate to tread, a wife beloved and honoured, a sister fondly loved, a daughter reconciled with her father, mistress of a fine old house, full of quaint and pleasant associations, established for life in the heart of rural scenes which her soul loved. Surely it was not a destiny to be contemplated with such profound sadness as shadowed her face to-night, while she leant listlessly on her oars and drifted down the full dark river.

All was very quiet below the bridge when she landed at the boat-builder's yard, and left her craft in charge of that amphibious and more than half-intoxicated hanger-on who is generally to be found waiting on fortune at every landing-stage. The walk to the church was dark and shadowy; lights twinkling in the low cottage windows; glimpses of home-life dimly seen through open doors. Daphne walked quickly to the avenue of limes, that green odorous aisle that leads to the porch. There had been evening service, and the lights were still burning here and there, and the heavy old door stood ajar. Daphne pushed it gently open, and crept into the church, past the stately monuments of mediæval Cloptons, whose marble effigies reposed in solemn pomp upon sculptured tombs, rich in armorial emblazonment. In the faint light and mysterious shadow the stony figures looked like real sleepers, waiting for the last dread summons. Daphne stole past them with noiseless footfall, and crept along the aisle to the lovely old chancel, where, just within the altar-rails, William Shakespeare takes his last earthly rest. The sexton came out of the vestry to see whose footfall it was that fell so lightly on that everlasting flint. Daphne was standing by the altar-rail in a reverie, looking up at the calm sculptured face, so serene in its contentment with a life which, in the vast range and dominion of a mind that was in itself a kingdom, had held all things worth having. These are the full and rounded lives, complete and perfect in themselves, the calm and placid lives of contemplative men, for whom the gates of the spiritual universe stand ever open, who are in no wise dependent upon the joys, and gains, and triumphs of this work-a-day world.

'Were you always happy, my calm-faced Shakespeare?' wondered Daphne. 'Could you have sounded all the deeps of sorrow without having yourself suffered? I think not. Yet there seems hardly any room in your life for great sorrow, except perhaps in the loss of that child who died young. Was Ann Hathaway your only love, I wonder—you who wrote so sweetly of sorrowful hopeless love—or was there another, another whom we know as Juliet, and Imogen, and Cordelia: another from whom you always lived far apart, yet whom you always loved?'

'I beg your pardon, miss,' said the sexton; 'I'm going to lock up the church.'

'Let me stay a few minutes longer,' pleaded Daphne, taking out her purse. 'I am going away from England to-morrow, and I have come to say good-bye to the dear old church.'

'Are you going to be away long, miss?'

'Nearly three months.'

'That's a very short time,' said the old man, pocketing Daphne's half-crown. 'I thought perhaps you were going away for many years—going to settle somewhere across the sea. It hardly seems like saying good-bye to the church if you are to be back among us this side Michaelmas.'

'No,' said Daphne dreamily, looking along the shadowy nave, where broken rays of moonlight from the painted windows shone upon the dark oak benches like dropped jewels. 'It is not long; but one never knows. To-night I feel as if it were going to be for ever. I am so fond of this old church.'

'No wonder, miss. It's a beautiful church. You should hear the Americans admire it. I suppose they've nothing half as good in their country.'

The moon was up when Daphne left the church, and walked round by head-stones and memorial-crosses to the shaded path beside the river, where here and there a seat on the low wall invited the weary to repose in the cool shade of ancient elms. The broad full river looked calm and bright under the moonlit sky; the murmur of the weir sounded like a lullaby.

Daphne walked slowly to the end of the path, and stood for a long time looking down at the river. She felt curiously loth to leave the spot. Yet it was time she were on her homeward way. They would miss her, perhaps, and be perplexed, and even anxious about her. But in the next moment she dismissed the idea of any such anxiety on her behalf.

'Lina will not think about me while Mr. Goring is with her; and my father is not likely to trouble himself. There is only poor Edgar, and he will guess which way I have come, and follow me if he takes it into his head to be uneasy.'

Reassured by this idea, Daphne resolved to gratify her fancy for farewells to the uttermost, and to say good-bye to the house where the poet was born. Stratford streets were very empty and quiet at this period of the summer evening, and she met only a few people between the churchyard and the sacred dwelling. To a stranger, entrance into the sanctuary at such an hour would have been out of the question; but Daphne was on friendly terms with the lady custodians of the temple, and knew she could coax them to unlock the door for her pleasure. Never lamp or candle was admitted within the precincts, but on such a night as this there would be no need for artificial light; and Daphne only wanted to creep into the quaint old

rooms, to look round her quietly for a minute or two, and feel the spirit of the place breathing poetry into her soul.

'I have such a strange fancy that I may never see these things again,' she said to herself as she stood in the moonlit garden, where only such flowers grew as were known in Shakespeare's time.

The two ladies lived in a snug little house with a strictly Elizabethan front, and casement windows that looked into the poet's garden. All that taste, and research, and an ardent love could do had been done to make Shakespeare's house and its surroundings exactly what they were when Shakespeare lived. The wise men of Stratford had brought their offerings, in the shape of old pictures, and manuscripts, and relics of all kinds; the rooms had been restored to their original form and semblance; and pilgrims from afar had no longer need to blush for the nation which owned such a poet and held his memorials so lightly. A very different state of things from the vulgar neglect which obtained when Washington Irving visited Stratford.

The maiden warders of the house were a little surprised at so late a visit, but received Daphne kindly all the same, and were disposed to be indulgent to girlish enthusiasm in so worthy a cause. It was against the rules to open the house at so late an hour; but as no light was needed, Daphne should be allowed just to creep in, and bid good-bye to the hearth beside which Shakespeare had played at his mother's knees.

'One would think you were going away for a long while, Miss Lawford,' said one of the ladies, smiling at Daphne's eager face.

It was exactly what the sexton had said, and Daphne made the same answer as she had given him.

'One never knows,' she said.

'Ah, but we know. You are coming home to be married in the autumn. We have heard all about it. Stratford Bells will ring a merry peal on that day, I should think; though I suppose the wedding will be at Arden Church. I am so glad you are going to settle in the neighbourhood, like your sister. What a grand place Goring Abbey is, to be sure! My sister and I drove over in a fly last summer to look at it. We went all over the house and grounds. It is a beautiful place. Yet I don't know but that I like Mr. Turchill's old manor-house best.'

'So do I,' answered Daphne absently.

'Of course you do!' cried the other sister, laughing. 'That's only natural.'

They all three went across the garden in the moonlight, and the elder sister unlocked the house-door.

'Would you like to go in alone?' she asked. 'You are not afraid of ghosts?'

'Of Shakespeare's ghost? No, I should dearly love to see him. I would fall on my knees and worship the beautiful spirit.'

'Go in, then. We'll wait in the garden.'

Daphne went softly into the empty house. It was more ghostly than the church—more uncanny in its emptiness. She felt as if the disembodied souls of the dead were verily around and about her. That empty hearth, on which the moonbeams shone so coldly; those dusky walls; a vacant chair or two; a gleam of coloured light from an old scrap of stained glass. How cold it all felt in its dismal loneliness. She tried to conjure up a vision of the poet's home three hundred years ago—in its old-world simplicity, its homely comfort and repose; a world before steam-engines, gas, and electricity; a world in which printing and gunpowder were almost new. To think of it was like going back to the childhood of this earth.

Daphne left the outer door ajar, and crept softly through the rooms, half expectant of ghostly company. What tricks moonbeam and shadow played upon the walls, upon the solid old timber crossbeams, where in the unregenerate days, a quarter of a century ago, pilgrims used to pencil their miserable names upon the wood or whitewash, childishly fancying they were securing to themselves a kind of immortality. Daphne stood by the window with her heart beating feverishly, and her ear strained to catch the footfall of the sisters in the garden, and thus to be sure of human company. She looked along the empty street, moonlighted, peaceful; even the tavern over the way a place of seeming tranquillity, notable only by its glimmering window and red curtain. The silence and shadowiness of the house were beginning to frighten her in spite of her better reason, when a step came behind her—a firm light tread which her ear and heart knew too well. It seemed almost as if her heart stopped beating at the sound of that footfall. She stood like a thing of marble, scarce breathing. The step had crossed the threshold of the outer room, and was drawing nearer, when an eager voice outside broke the spell:

'Is she there? Have you found her?'

It was Edgar's voice at the outer door.

'Yes. Where else should she be?' answered Gerald Goring.

'Well, my lady, I hope you are satisfied with the nice little dance you have led us,' he said to Daphne as coolly as if he had been talking to a refractory child.

'You need not have troubled yourself about me,' she answered curtly. 'I told Lina I was coming for a walk. How did Edgar know I was here?'

'Edgar knew nothing,' answered Gerald, with a light laugh that was something too scornful for perfect friendship. 'Edgar would as soon have looked for you at Guy's Cliff or Warwick

Castle, or in the moon. I knew you were nothing if not Shakespearian ; and when I heard you had taken your boat I guessed you had gone to worship at your favourite shrine. We heard of you at the church, and hunted for you among the trees and tombs.'

'And then we went back to the landing-stage, where you always stop, don't you know, when you go as far as Stratford, and finding you had not come back for your boat, I was almost in despair. But Gerald suggested Shakespeare's birthplace, and here we are.'

It was Gerald, then, who had found her ; it was Gerald whose quick sympathy, prompt to divine her thoughts, had told him where she would be. Her future husband, the man to whom she was bound, had guessed nothing, had no faculty for understanding her fancies, whims, and follies. How wide apart must she and he remain all their lives, though nominally one !

They all three went quietly back to the garden, where the sisters were waiting, amused at Daphne's folly, and thinking it quite the most charming thing in girlhood ; for to these vestals Shakespeare was a religion.

'I am really very sorry to have caused you so much trouble,' said Daphne, apologising in a general way ; 'but I had no idea my absence would give anyone concern. Perhaps I have been longer than I intended to be.'

'It struck ten a quarter of an hour ago,' said Edgar.

'That's really dreadful ; I had no idea it was so late.'

Daphne bade the sisters good-bye, apologising humbly for her nocturnal visit. They went to the garden-gate with her, and stood there watching the light slim figure till it vanished in the moonlight, full of interest in her prettiness and her fancies.

'Is it not a sweet face?' asked one.

'And was it not a sweet idea to come and bid good-bye to this house before she went abroad?' said the other.

Daphne and her companions walked down to the landing-stage, talking very little by the way. Edgar and his betrothed side by side, Gerald walking apart with a cigar.

Daphne wanted to row, but Edgar insisted on establishing her in the stern, wrapped in a shawl which he found in the boat. He took the sculls, and Gerald reclined in the bows, smoking and looking up at the night sky.

It was a lovely night, all the landscape sublimated by that glory of moonbeam and shadow into something better and more beautiful than its daylight simplicity ; every little creek and curve of the river a glimpse of fairyland ; all things so radiantly and mysteriously lovely that Daphne almost hoped to see the river-god and his attendant nymphs disporting themselves in some reedy shallow.

'On such a night as this one would expect to see the old Greek gods come back to earth. I can't help feeling sorry sometimes, like Alfred de Musset, that they are all dead and gone,' she said, looking with dreamy eyes down the moonlit tide across which the shadows of the willows fell so darkly.

'I think, considering the general tenor of their conduct, every proper-minded young lady ought to feel very glad we have got rid of them,' said Gerald, throwing away the end of his cigar, which fizzed and sparkled and made a little red spot in the moonlit water, a light that was of the earth earthy amidst all that heavenly radiance. 'How would you like to be run away with by a wicked old man disguised as a bull; or to have the earth open as you were gathering daffodils, and a still wickeder old gentleman leap out of his chariot to carry you off to Tartarus?'

'How dare you call Zeus old?' cried Daphne indignantly. 'The gods were for ever young.'

'Well, he was a family man at any rate, and ought to have known better than to go masquerading about the plains and valleys when he ought to have been sitting in state on Olympus,' answered Gerald. 'Now such a river on such a night as this puts me in mind of old German legends rather than of Greek gods and goddesses. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Miss Dapne Lawford were suddenly to develop into an Undine, and take a header into the river, cleaving the silvery tide, and going down to depths beyond any earthly fathom-line, leaving Turchill and me aghast in the boat.'

'I have often envied Undine,' answered Daphne; 'I love the river so dearly that years ago I used really to fancy that there must be a bright world underneath it, where there are gnomes and fairies, and where one might be happy for ever. Even now, though I have left off believing in fairies, I cannot help thinking that there is profound peace at the bottom of this quiet river.'

'If you were to go down experimentally in a diving-bell, I'm afraid you'd find only profound mud,' said Gerald, with his cynical laugh.

Since his return from Canada he had treated Daphne much in the old fashion—as if she were a child upon whose foolishness his wisdom looked down from an ineffable height. There was nothing in manner, word, or look to show that he remembered that one fatal moment of self-betrayal, when his passionate heart gave up its secret.

'I wonder what Daphne will think of this turbid Avon after she has seen Lake Leman,' he speculated presently, 'eh, Turchill?'

'The lake is a great deal wider,' said Edgar, with his matter-of-fact air; 'and those capital steamers are a great attraction.'

'A lake with steamers upon it! Too horrible!' cried Daphne. 'I shall not like it half so well as my romantic Avon, though its waters are sometimes "drumly." Dear old Avon!'—they were at the boat-house by this time, and she was stepping on shore as she spoke—'how long before I shall see you again?'

'Less than three months,' said Edgar, clasping her hand as she sprang up the steps which Bink had cut in the meadow bank. 'Not quite three months; and then, darling,' in a lower tone, 'you will be all my own, and I shall be the happiest man on earth.'

'Who knows?' returned Daphne. 'How can one be sure when one is leaving a place that one will ever come back to it? Good-bye, dear old river!' she cried, turning to look back at it with eyes full of tears. 'I feel as sad as if I were taking my last look at you.'

CHAPTER XXV.

'BUT I WOT BEST WHER WRINGETH ME MY SHO.'

TWENTY-FOUR hours after that quiet row up the moonlit river, the South Hill party were on the Calais steamer, tossing and tumbling about in the Channel, much to the discomfiture of Mrs. Mowser, who was a bad sailor, and took care to make everybody in the ladies' cabin perfectly familiar with that fact. There was nothing of the Spartan about Mowser, nothing in any wise heroic in her conduct under the trial of sea-sickness. Yet there was a kind of martyrlike fidelity in her; for even in her agony she never let her mistress's travelling-bag and jewel-box out of her eye—nay, would hardly trust those valuables out of her own grasp, clutching at them convulsively in the throes of her malady, and suspecting evil intentions in guileless fellow-sufferers.

It was a lovely night, and Madoline and Daphne both stayed on deck, to the indignation of Mowser, who was sure Miss Lawford would catch cold, and declared it was all Miss Daphne's doing.

'I thought you'd have come down to the cabin and had a comfortable lay-down,' said Mowser when they had all scrambled or staggered up the oozy steps, and had been interrogated as to their names by an alert official, in a manner somewhat alarming to the sleepy and feeble-minded voyager.

Then came a weary hour or so in the warm light refreshment-room, a cup of coffee, or a *bouillon*, a few stifled yawns, an occasional excursion to the platform, and finally the welcome departure, by flat fields and unknown marsh-lands, with the inevitable row of poplars against the horizon. Daphne seemed

to know the depressing landscape by heart. Her father, muffled in his corner, slept peacefully. Madoline slumbered, or seemed to slumber. Gerald and Edgar had secured a *coupé* to smoke in; and by a judicious arrangement with the guard Sir Vernon and his daughters had a compartment all to themselves. But not one wink of sleep visited Daphne's eyelids. Wearily she watched the monotonous landscape, enlivened a little now and then by a glimpse of village life in the clear cold light of early morning; cattle moving about in misty meadows, casements opening to the balmy air. What a long journey it seemed to that one wakeful passenger! but the longest—were it even a long unprofitable, uneventful life-journey—must end at last; and by-and-by there came the cry of 'Paris!' and the mandate that all passengers were to pass into the great bare luggage repository to answer for the contents of bags and baggage; a weary interval, during which the South Hill party loitered in bleak waiting-rooms, while Jinman and Mrs. Mowser delivered up keys, and satisfied the requirements of the State.

A long day in Paris, during which Sir Vernon reposed from his fatigues at the Bristol Hotel, while the young people went about sight-seeing; a dinner at Bignon's, where Daphne protested she could perceive no difference between the much-vaunted *consommé* of that establishment and Mrs. Spicer's clear soup; an evening at the Français, where they saw Got in Mercadet; and then off again in the early summer morning by the eight o'clock train for Dijon and Geneva, a twelve hours' journey.

It was a peerless morning. Paris, with its busy markets and teeming life, seemed brimming over with brightness and gaiety; boulevard-building in full progress; waggons coming in from the country; artisans hurrying, grisettes tripping to their work. Daphne's spirits rose with the thought of fresh woods and pastures new.

'I have been longing all my life to see Switzerland,' she said, when all the difficulties of departure were overcome, and the train was speeding gaily past suburban gardens, and groves, and bridges, 'and now I can hardly believe I am going there. It is a journey to dream about and look forward to, not to come to pass.'

'Are no bright things ever to come to pass? Is all life to be dull and colourless?' asked Gerald Goring, sitting opposite her in the railway carriage, with Lina by his side. They were all together to-day, having established themselves as comfortably as possible in the spacious compartment, and having provided themselves largely with light literature, wherewith to beguile the tedium of the journey.

'I don't know about you,' said Daphne; 'you are an exceptional person, and have been able to realise all your dreams!'

'Not all,' answered Gerald gravely: 'I suppose no one ever does that.'

'You have but to form a wish, and, lo! it is gratified,' murmured Daphne, taking no notice of his interruption. 'Last winter it flashed across your brain that it would be nice to shoot cariboos—poor innocent harmless cariboos, who had never injured you—and, in a thought, you are off and away by seas and rivers and snow and ice to gratify the whim. What pleasure can Switzerland have for you? Every inch of it must be as vapidly familiar as that dear old English Warwickshire which you esteem so lightly.'

'Perhaps; but it is a pleasure to revisit a familiar place with those I love. I was a poor solitary waif when I went through Switzerland, from Geneva to Constance, from Lindau to Samaden, picking up my companions by the way, or travelling in Byronic solitude—though, by the way, I doubt if Byron ever was much alone. Judged by his poetry, he may be a gloomy and solitary spirit: but judged by his life and letters, he was a social soul.'

'I like to think of him as gloomy and alone,' said Daphne, with a determined air. 'Please don't dispel all my illusions.'

Edgar was sitting by her side, cutting up magazines and newspapers, watchful of her every look, thinking her every word delightful, ready to minister to her comfort or pleasure, but without much ability to entertain her with any conversational brightness—unless they two could have been alone, and could have talked of their future life at Hawksyard; the stables, the gardens, the horses they were to ride together next winter, when Daphne was to take the field, a heaven-born Diana. He was never tired of talking of that happy future, so near, so near, and to which he looked forward with such fervent hope.

They were nearing Fontainebleau: already the forest showed dark on the horizon. Daphne, so vivacious hitherto, became curiously silent. She sat looking towards that distant line of wood, that smiling valley with its winding river. All her soul was in her eyes as she looked. Two years ago—almost day for day, two years—and her heart had awakened suddenly from its long sleep of childish innocence to feel and to suffer.

Gerald stole a look—guiltily as it were—at the too expressive face. Yes, she remembered. Her soul was full of sad and tender memories. He could read all her secrets in those lovely eyes, the lips slightly parted, the lace about her neck stirred faintly by the throbbing of her heart. She had no more forgotten Fontainebleau and their meetings there than he had. To each it dated a crisis in life: for each it had given a new colour to every thought and feeling.

Lina, her hands moving slowly in some easy knitting, looked up at her sister.

'Are we not near Fontainebleau, where you spent your holidays once?' she asked.

'Yes,' Daphne answered shortly.

'You speak as if you had not been happy there.'

'I liked the place very much; but it was a dull life. Poor Miss Toby and her sick headaches, and Dibb for my only companion.'

'And Dibb was ineffably stupid,' said Gerald, suddenly forgetting himself, and moved to laughter at the thought of honest Martha's stolidity; 'at least, I have often heard you say as much,' he added hastily.

'She was a good harmless thing, and I won't have her ridiculed,' said Daphne, brightening, all serious thoughts taking flight at the absurdity of Gerald's lapse. 'I wonder if she has finished that crochet counterpane.'

'Finished it! Of course not,' cried Gerald. 'She is the sort of girl who would die, and come to life again in a better world still working at the same counterpane—as I imagine from your description of her.' he concluded meekly.

They were leaving Fontainebleau far behind them by this time; its old church, and its palace, with all its historic memories of Francis and Henri, Napoleon and Pius VII. The forest was but a dark spot in the vanishing distance; they were speeding away to the rich wine country with its vast green plains, and steep hill-sides clothed with vines. At two o'clock they were at Dijon, and seemed to have been travelling a week. Sir Vernon grumbled at the dust and heat, and regretted that he had undertaken the whole journey in a day.

'We ought to have stayed the night at Dijon,' he said fretfully, when they were out of the station, steaming away towards Macon, after a hurried luncheon in the well furnished refreshment-room.

'It is a wretchedly dull place to stop at, sir,' said Gerald; 'hardly anything to see.'

'At my age a man does not want always to be seeing things,' growled Sir Vernon; 'he wants rest.'

The day had been oppressively hot—a sultry heat, a sun-baked landscape. Madoline and her sister bore it with admirable patience, beguiling the tedium of those long hours now with conversation, now with books, anon with quiet contemplation of the landscape, which for a long way offered no striking features. It was growing towards evening when they entered the Jura region, and found themselves in a world that was really worth looking at: a wild strange world, as it appeared to Daphne's eye; vast rolling masses of hill that seemed to have been thrown up in long waves before this little world assumed shape and solidity; precipitous green slopes, grassy walls that

shut out the day, and the deep rapid river cleaving its tumultuous course through the trough of the hills.

'Don't you think this is better than Stratford-upon-Avon?' asked Gerald mockingly, as he watched Daphne's excited face, her eyes wide with wonder.

'Ever so much wilder and grander. I should like to live here.'

'Why?'

'Because in such a world one would forget oneself. One's own poor little troubles would seem too mean and trumpery to be thought about.'

'No man's trouble is small or mean to the sufferer himself,' replied Gerald. 'There is nothing grand or dignified in the abstract notion of Job's boils; yet to him they meant an unendurable agony which tempted him to curse his Creator and destroy his own life. I don't believe the grandest natural surroundings would lessen one's sense of the thorn in one's side.'

'I don't think you have any thorns, Daphne,' said Edgar tenderly, 'or that you need take refuge from your sorrows among these desolate-looking mountains.'

'Of course not. I was only speaking generally,' answered Daphne lightly: 'but oh! what a mighty world it is—hills that climb to the sky, and such lovely tranquil valleys lying between those dark earth walls. Vines, and water-mills, and waterfalls tumbling over rocky beds. If Switzerland is much grander than this, I think its grandeur will kill me. I can hardly breathe when I look up at those great dark hills.'

'I don't know that there is anything in Switzerland that impresses one so much as one's first view of the Jura,' said Gerald. 'It is the giant gateway of a mountain land—the entrance into a new world.'

The heat seemed to increase rather than diminish with the shades of evening. No cool breeze sprang up with the going down of the sun. The sultry atmosphere thickened, and became almost stifling; and then, just as it was growing dark, big raindrops came splashing down, a roar of thunder rolled along the hills, like a volley of cannon; thin threads of vivid light trembled and zigzagged behind the hill-tops, and the storm which had been brooding over them all the afternoon broke in real earnest.

'A thunderstorm in the Jura,' exclaimed Gerald; 'what a lucky young woman you are, Miss Ross, Daphne! Here is one of Nature's grandest effects got up as if on purpose to give you pleasure.'

'I hope it may cool the air,' said Sir Vernon, from the comfortable corner where he had been fitfully slumbering ever since they left the French territory.

Daphne sat looking out of the window, and spoke never a

word. She was drinking in the beauty and grandeur of this unspeakable region, trying to fill her soul with the form and manner of it. Yes, it was worth while living, were it only to see these mountain peaks and gorges; these hurrying waters and leaping torrents; these living forces of everlasting Nature. She had been weary of her life very often of late, so weary that she would gladly have flung it off her like a worn-out garment, and have lain down in dull contentment to take her last earthly rest; but to-night she was glad to be alive—to see the forked lightnings dancing upon the mountain-sides; to hear all earth shudder at the roar of the thunder; to feel herself a part of that grand conflict. A little later, when they had gone through an almost endless tunnel, and were nearing Geneva, the thunder grew more and more distant, seemed to travel slowly away, like an enemy's cannon firing stray shots as the foe retreated; and the night sky flung off its black cloud-mantle, and all the stars shone out of a calm purple heaven; while the little lights of the city, faint yellow spots upon the dark blue night, trembled and quivered in the distance.

'Isn't this dreadfully like one's idea of Manchester?' said Daphne, when they were in the station, and tickets were being collected in the usual businesslike way.

'Can there be a higher model than Manchester for any commercial city?' asked Gerald.

'Commercial! Oh, I hope there is nothing commercial in Switzerland. I have always thought of it as a land of mountains and lakes.'

'So is Scotland, yet there is such an element as trade in that country.'

'You are bent on destroying my illusions. Oh, what a horrid row of omnibuses!' cried Daphne, as they came out of the station and confronted about twenty of those vehicles, with doors hospitably open, and commissionaires eager to abduct new arrivals for their several hotels. 'And where is Mont Blanc?' she inquired, looking up at the surrounding chimney-pots.

'At your elbow,' answered Gerald; 'but you may not see him to-night. The monarch of mountains is like our own gracious sovereign, and is not always visible to his subjects.'

There was a private carriage from the Beau Rivage Hotel waiting for the South Hill party, and in this they all drove down a hilly-street, which was bright and clean, and wide, and prosperous-looking, but cruelly disappointing to Daphne. Jinman and Mowser followed in the omnibus with the luggage. Mowser, like Daphne, was considerably disappointed.

'If this is Switzerland, I call it very inferior to Brighton,' she said snappishly. 'Where are the glaziers and the mountings?'

'Did you expect to find them just outside the station?'

demanded the more travelled Jinman. 'I have lived months in Switzerland and never seen a glashyeer. I don't hold with having one's bones rattled to bits upon a mule for the sake of seeing a lot of dirty ice. One can look at that any hard winter on the Serpentine.'

'Swisserland is Swisserland,' answered Mowser sententiously, 'and I don't hold with travelling all this way from home—I'm sure I thought this blessed day would never come to an end—unless we are to see somethink out of the common.'

'The hotels are first class,' said Jinman, 'and so are the restorongs on board the boats. Nobody need starve in Switzerland.'

'Can we get a decent cup of tea?' asked Mowser. 'There's not a scullery-maid at South Hill as would drink such cat-lap as they brought me at the Bristol.'

Jinman explained that the teapot was an institution fully understood in the Helvetian States.

'They're a more domestic people than the French,' said Jinman condescendingly, 'I must say that for them. But Genever is the poorest place for restorongs I was ever at; plenty of your caffy-staminies, where you may drink bad wine and smoke bad cigars to your heart's content; but hardly a decent house where you can get a dejoonay à la fourchette, or give a little bit of dinner to a friend. The hotels have got it all their own way.'

'They ought to,' answered Mowser, 'when there's such a many of 'em. I wonder they can all pay.'

At the Beau Rivage, Sir Vernon and his daughters found a spacious suite of rooms on the third floor, many-windowed, balconied, looking over the lake. The two young men had secured quarters a little way off at the International. Sir Vernon grumbled at being put on the third storey, after having given due notice of his coming; but the American dollar and the Russian rouble had bought up the first and second stages of the big hotel, and an English country gentleman must needs be contented with an upper floor. But the rooms were lovely, and Daphne was delighted with their altitude.

'We are all the nearer Mont Blanc,' she said, standing half in and half out of the window; 'one of the waiters told me it was over there—*tout près*—but though I have been straining my eyes ever since, I can't discover a gleam of snow behind those dark hills.'

There were the loveliest flowers on the tables and cabinets, such flowers as one hardly expects to find at an hotel, were it never so luxurious. Madoline admired them wonderingly.

'One would think the people here knew my particular vanity, and were anxious to gratify me,' she said; and then turning to one of the waiters who was arranging books and writing-desks

on the tables, she asked: 'Have you always such lovely flowers in the rooms?'

'No, madame. They were ordered this morning by a telegram from Paris.'

'Father! No, Gerald; it must have been your doing.'

'A happy thought while I was loitering about that miserable railway-station,' replied Gerald.

'How good of you! Dear flowers. They make the place seem like home.'

'When you are settled at Montreux we can arrange for the contents of the Abbey hot-houses to be sent you weekly. It will be something for that pampered menial MacCloskie to look after, in the intervals of his cigars and metaphysical studies. I have an idea that he employs all his leisure in reading Dugald Stewart. There is a hardness about him which I can only attribute to a close study of abstract truth.'

Daphne was standing out in the balcony, with Edgar at her side, looking down at the scene below. Geneva seemed pretty enough in this night view—a city of lake and lamplight, ringed round with mountains; a city of angles and bridges, sharp lines, lofty houses, peaked roofs; the dark bulk of a cathedral, with a picturesque lantern on the roof, dominating all the rest.

'I think if it would only lighten I could see Mont Blanc,' said Daphne, with her eyes fixed upon that bit of sky to which the waiter had pointed when she questioned him about the mountain. 'One good vivid flash would light it up beautifully.'

'My dearest, how dangerous!' exclaimed Edgar; 'pray, come out of the balcony. You might be blinded.'

'I'll risk that. It will not be the first time I have stared the lightning out of countenance.'

A summer flash lit up the sky as she spoke. There was one wide quiver of pale blue light, but never a glimpse of snow-clad peak gleamed from the distance.

'How horrid!' exclaimed Daphne; 'but that was a very poor flash. I'll wait for a better one.'

She waited for half-a-dozen, in spite of Edgar's urgent efforts to lure her indoors, but the summer flashes showed her nothing but their own vivid light.

'If the electric light prove no better than that for all practical uses, I don't envy the inventor,' she exclaimed with infinite disgust.

Dinner was served in the adjoining room, but Madoline and her sister begged to be excused from dining. They would take tea together in the drawing-room while the three gentlemen dined. Sir Vernon declared that he had no appetite, but he was willing to sit down, for the public good as it were. After which protest he did ample justice to a *sole à la Normande*, and a

poulet à la Marengo, to say nothing of such pretty tiny kickshaws as *gâteau St. Honoré* and ice-pudding.

For Madoline and Daphne a round table was spread with a snowy cloth, a pile of delicious rolls, unquestionable butter, and a glass dish of pale golden honey, excellent tea, and cream—a thoroughly Arcadian meal.

'Dearest, how brightly your eyes are sparkling,' said Lina, with an admiring look at the young face opposite. 'I can see you are enjoying yourself.'

'Yes, there is always a pleasure in novelty. Why cannot one pass all one's life in new places? The world is wide enough. It is only our own foolishness that keeps us tied, like a poor tethered animal, to one dull spot.'

'Why, Daphne, I thought you were so fond of home, that the banks of the Warwickshire Avon made up your idea of earthly paradise!'

'Sometimes, yes. But lately I have grown terribly tired of Warwickshire.'

'That's a bad hearing; and next year, when you are settled at Hawksyard——'

'Please don't speak of that. Thank Heaven we are three days' journey from Hawksyard. Let me forget it if I can.'

'Daphne, how can you talk like that of a dear old place which is to be your home—a place where one of the best men living was born?'

'If you think him such a wonder of goodness, why did you not have him when he asked you?' cried Daphne, in a sudden fit of irritation. Those nerves of hers, always too highly strung, were to-night at their sharpest tension. 'I am sick to death of hearing him praised by people who don't care a straw about him.'

'Daphne!' exclaimed Lina, more grieved than offended at this outburst.

Daphne was on her knees beside her sister in the next moment.

'Forgive me, darling, I am hideously cross and disagreeable. I suppose it is that tiresome lightning and the annoyance of not seeing Mont Blanc. All that long, dusty, fusty journey, and nothing but an hotel and a lamp-lit town at the end of it. I wanted to find myself in the very heart of mountains, and glaciers, and avalanches.'

'I think you know how honestly I like Edgar,' said Madoline, believing in her guilelessness that Daphne had resented her praise of Mr. Turchill because she fancied it hollow and insincere. 'I daresay if I had not cared for Gerald long before Edgar proposed to me, I might have given Mr. Turchill a different answer. I cannot tell how that might have been. My life has had only one love. I loved Gerald from the days

when he first came to South Hill, a schoolboy, when he used to tell me all his troubles and his triumphs, when any success of his made me prouder than if it had been my own. My heart was given away ages before Edgar ever spoke to me of love.'

'I know, dear; I can understand it all; only, don't you know, when everybody conspires to praise the young man to whom one is engaged, and when all one's relations are everlastingly congratulating one upon one's good fortune—the implication being that it is quite undeserved—there is a kind of weariness that creeps over one's soul at the sound of those familiar phrases.'

'I will never praise him again, dear,' answered Lina, smiling at her. 'I shall be perfectly contented to know that you value him as he deserves to be valued, and that your future happiness is assured by his devoted love.'

Daphne gave a fretful little sigh, but made no further protest. She was thinking that she had seen a Newfoundland dog every whit as devoted as Edgar. Yet the affection of that Newfoundland would have hardly been deemed all-sufficient for the happiness of a lifetime.

She went back to the table, and did execution upon the rolls and honey with a healthy girlish appetite, despite that feverish unrest which disturbed the equal balance of her mind.

Daphne ordered Edgar to attend her on an exploration of the city next morning, directly after breakfast.

'Madoline and my father know the place by heart,' she said; 'and, of course, Mr. Goring is tired of it. How could a man who is weary of all creation care for Geneva?'

'Who told you I was weary of creation?' asked Gerald languidly.

'Your ways and your manners,' replied Daphne. 'I knew as much the first time I saw you.'

The weather was clear and bright, the town looking its best, as Daphne and her lover left the hotel on their excursion. They were to be back before noon, at which hour they were to start with Gerald and Madoline for Ferney.

'If it were not for the lake this place would be beneath contempt,' said Daphne decisively, as they crossed the low level bridge, and lingered to look at the sapphire Rhone, and to speculate upon that deepened azure hue which the waters assume when they flow from the lake into the river. 'It is no more like the Geneva of my dreams than it is like Jerusalem the Golden.'

'Is it not really?'

'Of course not. My idea of Switzerland was a succession of mountain ledges, varied by an occasional plank across a torrent. Imagine my revulsion of feeling at finding a big businesslike

town, with omnibuses, and cafés, and manufactories, and everything that is common-place and despicable.'

'But, surely, I think you must have known that Geneva was a town,' faltered Edgar, grieved at his dear one's ignorance, and glad to think his mother was not by to compare this foolishness with her own precise geographical knowledge, acquired thirty years ago at Miss Tompion's, and carefully harvested in the store-house of a methodical mind.

'Well, perhaps I may have expected something in the way of a city: a semi-circle of white peaky houses on the margin of the lake: a mediæval watch-tower or two; a Gothic gateway, the very gate that was shut against Rousseau, don't you know; and Mont Blanc in full view.'

'I call it a very fine town,' said Edgar, venturing to disagree with his beloved.

'I wish it did not swarm so with English and Americans. I have heard nothing but my own tongue since I came out,' protested Daphne.

She was better pleased presently when they mounted a narrow street on the side of a break-neck hill. She was tolerably satisfied with the cathedral, where the tomb of the great Protestant leader Henri de Rohan took her fancy by its massive grandeur, couchant lions at its base, the soldier in his armour above. She was interested in the pulpit from which Calvin and Theodore de Bèze preached the Reformed Faith, and was somewhat disgusted with her companion for his utter ignorance of the historic past, save inasmuch as it was feebly reflected in the most limited and conventional course of instruction.

'What did you learn at Rugby?' she asked impatiently. 'You don't seem to know anything.'

'We didn't give much time to history, except Livy and Xenophon,' answered Edgar, feebly apologetic.

'And therefore you are not a bit of use as a cicerone. You really ought to subscribe to Mudie and read a lot of instructive books. There's no good in reading old histories; people are always discovering letters and archives that put the whole story of the past in a new light. You must get your history hot from the press.'

'I would rather take my information at second-hand from you, dear,' answered Edgar meekly. 'It seems natural to women to read a great deal, and to find almost a second life in books, but men——'

'Are so shamefully lazy that their capacity for taking in knowledge is exhausted by the time they have skimmed the daily papers,' answered Daphne. 'And now, please, take me to the museums Mr. Goring told you about.'

With some trouble, and a good deal of inquiring, they found a private collection of art and *bric-à-brac*, historical relics,

furniture, delf, and china, that was well worth seeing. Then, having regaled their eyes upon this to the uttermost, they scampered off to the public museum, where the only objects of thrilling interest were the manuscripts and letters of dead and gone celebrities, from Calvin downwards. They found that famous reformer's penmanship as angular as his character; they found Bossuet a careless and sprawling writer; Fénelon careful, neat, and fine; the Duc de Richelieu a fop even in the use of his pen, his writing exquisitely clear, minute, and regular; while De Maintenon's hand was large, bold, angular, and eminently readable—the natural indication of an unscrupulous managing temper, a woman born to govern, by fair means or foul. Daphne lingered a little over Rousseau's manuscript of 'Julie,' a work of delicate neatness, evidently copied from the rough draft.

'Is not "Julie" one of the novels which one mustn't read?' asked Daphne, when she had perused half a page. 'It looks uncommonly dull. I thought wicked stories were always interesting.'

Edgar had never heard of 'Julie.' It was doubtful if he had ever heard of Rousseau; but at this remark he hurried Daphne away from the manuscript, lest some snaky little bit of immorality should uncurl itself on the page, and lift up its evil head before her. It was time for them to get back to the hotel, so they gave but a cursory glance at the pictures and other treasures of the museum, and hastened into the glare of the broad white street, where Edgar insisted upon putting his betrothed into a fly. They found Madoline and Gerald waiting for them in the porch of the Beau Rivage, and a smart open carriage with a pair of horses ready to take them to Ferney.

'Thank goodness we are going away from Geneva,' said Daphne, as the carriage rattled through the wide clean streets towards the country; 'and now I suppose we shall see something really Swiss.'

'You will see the home of a great man of letters,' answered Gerald, looking at her lazily with those languid dreamy eyes whose shifting hue had so puzzled her in the forest of Fontainebleau, 'and as you are such a hero-worshipper, that ought to satisfy you.'

'I don't care a straw for Voltaire,' said Daphne.

'Indeed! And pray how much do you know about him?'

'Everything. I have read Carlyle's description of him in "Frederick the Great." He was a horrid man; cringed to his goat-faced eminence Dubois; allowed himself to be caned by the Duc de Rohan's hired bravoes, the Duc looking on out of a hackney coach window all the time.'

'Don't say allowed himself. I don't suppose he could help it.'

'He ought to have prevented it. Imagine a great man beginning his career by being beaten in the public streets.'

'Who knows that your Shakespeare did not get a sound drubbing from Sir Thomas Lucy's gamekeepers, before he was stung into retaliating by that exquisitely refined lampoon which tradition ascribes to him? You worship your Swan of Avon for what he wrote, not for what he did. Can you not deal the same measure to Voltaire?'

'I don't know anything of his writing, except a few speeches out of "Zaïre," and an epitome of his "Louis Quatorze." If you are going to put him on an equality with Shakespeare——'

'I am not. But I say that as an all-round literary worker he never had an equal, unless it were Scott, who has surpassed him in many things, and who could, I believe, have equalled him on any ground.'

'Scott was an old dear,' answered Daphne, with her usual flippancy, 'and I would rather have "Kenilworth" and "The Bride of Lammermoor" than all this Voltaire of yours ever wrote.'

'And which you, most conscientious of critics, never read.'

'Well, Daphne, what do you think of the country?' asked Madoline, now that they had left the city and were driving slowly up hill through a pastoral district. 'Is it not pretty?'

'Pretty,' cried Daphne, 'of course it is pretty; but it isn't Swiss. What do I care for prettiness? There is enough of that and to spare in Warwickshire. Why,' with ineffable disgust, 'the country is absolutely green!'

'What colour did you expect it to be?' asked Edgar, smiling at her energetic displeasure.

'White, of course! One dazzling sweep of snow. One blinding world of whiteness.'

'If you want that kind of thing you had better go to the North Pole,' said Gerald.

'Not I. If this is Switzerland I have done with travelling. I daresay the North Pole is as tame as Stratford High Street.'

'Does not that grand Jura range frowning yonder content you?' asked Gerald. 'Is not your eye satisfied by the cloud-wrapped Alps on the other side of that blue lake?'

'No; they are too far off. I want to be among them—a part of them. After a hypocritical waiter telling me last night that Mont Blanc was *là, tout près*, a truthful chambermaid confessed this morning that it is fourteen hours' drive to Chamounix, and then one is only at the foot of the mountain. As for this landscape we are now travelling through——'

'It is uncommonly like Jersey,' said Edgar. 'I took my mother there for her holiday five summers ago. It is a capital place for boating and rambling about, and crossing over to the

other islands: but the mater didn't like it. The people weren't genteel enough for her. The gowns and bonnets weren't up to her mark.'

They were at Ferney by this time, a rustic village with one or two humble cafés, a few small shops, a farm-yard. Here Daphne descried a pair of oxen drawing a waggon of hay—noble beasts, dappled and tawny—and the sight of these gave a foreign air to the scene which in some wise lessened her disgust.

A shaded shrubberied drive admitted them to the house where Voltaire lived so long and so peacefully, and which is now in the occupation of a gentleman who graciously allows it to be shown—rather ungraciously—by his major-domo. Lightly as Daphne had spoken of Voltaire, she was too keenly imaginative not to be interested in the house which any famous man had inhabited. Two quiet rooms, *salon* and bed-chamber, looked into a short broad alley of trees, a garden, and summer-house perched high on the hill-side, and commanding a wide prospect of fertile valley and gloomy mountain. All things in those two rooms were exactly as they had been in the great man's lifetime; everything was exquisitely neat, and all the colours had faded to those delicate half-tints which the artistic soul loveth: faint grays and purples, fainter greens and fawn colours. Here was the narrow bed on which Voltaire slept, with its embroidered coverlet; chairs and *fauteuils* covered with tapestry; walls upholstered with figured satin damask, pale with age; Lekain's portrait over the bed; Madame du Châtelet's opposite, where the great satirist's cynical glance must have rested on it as he awakened from his slumbers.

They all looked reverently at these things, hushed and subdued by the thought that they were amidst the surroundings of the dead; belongings that had once been familiar and precious to him who now slept the last long sleep in his vault at the Pantheon; where never-ending gangs of Cook's tourists are perpetually being ushered into his mausoleum, and perpetually asking one another who was Voltaire?

They loitered a little in the garden, wrote their names in a visitors'-book, and then went back to explore the village, and to take a modest luncheon of coffee and bread and butter, sour claret, and Gruyère cheese at one of the humble taverns, while the horses stood at ease before the door, and the driver refreshed himself modestly at the expense of his fare.

They drove home to the hotel by a way which passed through a quaint village, and then skirted the lake, and which was somewhat more romantic than the country road by which they had come, and Daphne expressed herself satisfied, on the whole, with her first day in Switzerland.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'FORBID A LOVE AND IT IS TEN TIMES SO WODE.'

SIR VERNON showed himself especially gracious to his younger daughter and her lover next morning at breakfast, when the itinerary of their holiday was discussed. So far as his own pleasure was concerned, he would have liked nothing better than to go straight to Montreux, where a delightful villa, with a garden sloping to the lake, had been secured for his accommodation; but he did not forget that Daphne had seen nothing of Switzerland, and Edgar very little; and for their sakes he was ready to make considerable sacrifices.

'I am a wretched traveller, and I detest sight-seeing,' he said languidly; 'but I don't wish to spoil other people's pleasure. Suppose we make a little round before we settle down in our villa by the lake? Let us go to Fribourg and hear the organ, and then on to Berne for a day or so, and then to Interlaken. There I can rest quietly in my own rooms at the Jungfraublich, while you young people drive to Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, and do any little climbing in a mild way which is compatible with the safety of your necks and bones generally; and then we can come straight back to Montreux. How would you like that, Madoline?'

'Very much, indeed, dear father. It will be a delight to me to go over the old ground with Daphne.'

'And you, Goring?'

'I am Lina's slave—her shadow; true as the dial to the sun.'

'Papa,' said Daphne, drawing her chair nearer to him, and with a coaxing look which no man but a father could have resisted, 'it is so good of you to propose such a charming trip, and I shall enjoy it immensely; but would it be any way possible, now we are so near, to go to Chamounix, and get to the top of Mont Blanc; or, at least, part of the way up?'

'No, my dear. Quite out of the question.'

'But it is only a drive to Chamounix; and there is a diligence goes every morning.'

'Edgar can take you there next year, when you are married. I am too old for a drive of fourteen hours' duration.'

Daphne looked miserable. Mont Blanc was the central point of all her desires. It irked her to be so near and not to reach the world-famous mountain. She looked at Edgar doubtfully. No; she could not realise the idea of coming back next year, alone with him. She had never been able to project her mind into that future in which they two should be one, bound by a sacred yoke, doomed to be for ever together. From any casual glance at such a future her mind always shrank away shudderingly, as from the dim memory of a bad dream.

'I don't believe I shall ever come to Switzerland again,' she said discontentedly, when breakfast was finished and her father had retired to his own room to write letters.

Madoline was sitting at work by an open window, silken water-lilies and bulrushes developing themselves gradually under her skilful fingers, on a ground of sage-green cloth. The tables were covered with books and miniature stands; the room was bright with flowers, and looked almost as homelike as South Hill; but before the evening Mowser and Jinman would have packed all these things, and despatched the greater part of them to Montreux, while the travellers went on to Fribourg in light marching order, which in this case meant about three portmanteaux per head. Some books must, of course, be taken, and drawing materials, and fancy-work, and a writing-desk or two, and camp-stools for sitting about in romantic places, and a good deal more, which made a formidable array of luggage by-and-by when Sir Vernon and his family were assembled at the railway-station.

'Do you mean to tell me that we require all these things for a week or ten days?' he said, scowling at the patient Jinman, who was standing on guard over a compact pyramid of trunks, portmanteaux, and Gladstone bags, umbrellas, sunshades, and heterogeneous etceteras.

'I don't think there's anything could have been dispensed with, Sir Vernon,' answered Jinman. 'The books and ornaments and most of the heavy luggage have gone on to Montrooks.'

'Great Heaven, in the face of this would any man marry, and make himself responsible for feminine existences!' exclaimed Sir Vernon, shrugging his shoulders disgustedly as he turned away; yet Jinman could have informed him that his own share of the luggage was quite equal to that of his daughters.

They were all established presently in a German railway compartment: Sir Vernon seated in his corner and absorbed in an English newspaper, whose ample sheet excluded every glimpse of lake and wooded slopes, Alps and Jura; while Edgar smoked on the platform outside, and Daphne stood at the open door, gazing at the changing landscape: the smiling lake below; the dark slopes and mountain range on the farther shore; the villages nestling in the valley on this nearer bank, the cosy little homesteads and bright gardens; the vine-clad terraces, divided by low gray walls; the quaint old churches, with tiled roofs and square clock-towers; and yonder, far away at the end of the lake, Chillon's gloomy fortress, which she recognised with a cry of delight, having seen its presentment in engravings and photographs, and knowing Byron's poem by heart.

She gave a sigh of regret as a curve of the line carried her away from the azure lake and its panorama of hills.

'I can hardly bear to leave it,' she said; 'but, thank Heaven, we are coming back to it soon.'

'You are reconciled to Switzerland, then, in spite of your disillusions,' said Gerald.

'Reconciled! I should like to live and die here.'

'What! abandon your beloved Shakespeare's country?'

'I am heartily sick of Shakespeare's country.'

'Daphne,' cried Edgar, with a look of deepest mortification, 'that is a bad look-out for poor old Hawksyard.'

'Hawksyard is a dear old place, but I don't want to be reminded of it—or of anything else in Warwickshire—now I am in Switzerland. I want to soar, if I can. I am in Byron's country. He lived there,' pointing downwards to where they had left Lausanne and Ouchy. 'He wrote some of his loveliest poetry there: his genius is for ever associated with these scenes. Sad, unsatisfied spirit!'

Her eyes filled with sudden tears at the thought of that disappointed life, seeking solace from all that is loveliest in Nature, shunning the beaten tracks, yet never finding peace.

'If you are very good,' said Gerald gravely, 'within the next ten minutes I will show you something you are anxious to see.'

'What is that?'

'Mont Blanc. Get your glass ready.'

'Why, we left him behind us, across the lake, sulkily veiled in impenetrable cloud.'

'He will show himself more amiable presently. You will get a good view of him in five minutes if you focus your glass properly and don't chatter.'

Daphne spoke never a word, but stood motionless, with her landscape glass glued to her eyes, and waited, as for a divine revelation.

Yes, yonder it arose, white and cloudlike on the edge of the blue summer sky, the mighty snow-clad range, of which Mont Blanc is but a detail—the grand inaccessible region; mountain-top beyond mountain-top; peak above peak; everlasting, untrodden hills, producing nothing, pasturing nothing, stupendous and ghastly as the polar seas; a world apart from all other worlds; a spectacle to awe the dullest soul and thrill the coldest heart; a revelation of Nature's Titanic beauty.

'Oh, it must have been such mountains as these that the Titans hurled about them when they fought with Zeus,' cried Daphne when she had gazed and gazed till the last gleam of those white crests vanished in the distance.

'Do you feel better?' asked Gerald, with his mocking smile.

'I feel as if I had seen the world that we are to know after death,' answered Daphne.

'Would you be surprised to hear that these excrescences, which you think so grand, are but modern incidents in the history of the earth? Time was when Switzerland was one vast ice-field: nay, if we can believe Lyell, the clay of London was in course of accumulation as marine mud at a time when the ocean still rolled its waves over the space now occupied by some of the loftiest Alpine summits.'

'Please don't be instructive,' exclaimed Daphne. 'I want to know nothing about them, except that they are there, and that they are beautiful.'

At Fribourg they drove down the narrow street to the Zähringer Hof, the hotel by the suspension bridge, where from a balcony they looked down a sheer descent to the river, and to the roofs and chimneys of the old town lying in a cleft of the hills, while yonder, suspended in mid-air, a mere spider-thread across the sky, stretched the upper and loftier bridge. It was nearly dinner time when they arrived. There were dark clouds on the horizon, and only gleams of watery sunshine behind the gray old watch-towers on the crest of the hill across the river.

'I'm afraid we are going to have another storm,' said Gerald, lounging against the embrasure of a window, and looking as if Fribourg, with its modern suspension bridges and mediæval watch-towers, were just the most uninteresting place in the world.

He looked thoroughly worn-out and weary, as if he had been labouring hard with body and mind all day, instead of lolling in a railway-carriage, staring listlessly at the landscape. Sir Vernon, the ostensible invalid, was not more languid.

'Let it come down,' cried Daphne; 'but whatever the weather may be, I shall go and hear the organ after dinner. There is the bell for vespers. How nice it is to find oneself in a Roman Catholic town, with vesper-bells ringing, and dear old priests and nuns and all sorts of picturesque creatures walking about the streets!'

They dined in their own sitting-room, Sir Vernon having a good old English dislike to any intercourse with unintroduced fellow-creatures. To sit at a *table-d'hôte* with the Tom, Dick, and Harry of cockney Switzerland would have been abhorrent to him.

'We may get a worse dinner in our own room,' he said, looking doubtfully at some unknown spoon-food offered to him by way of an *entrée*, 'but we avoid rubbing shoulders with the kind of people who travel nowadays.'

'Are they so much worse than the people who used to travel——'

'When I was a young man? Yes, Daphne, quite a different race,' said Sir Vernon with authority. 'Gerald was right. We are in for another storm.'

A quiver of livid light, a crash of thunder, and black darkness yonder behind the hills gave emphasis to his statement. Daphne flew to the window to look at the bridges and the towers, which were almost expunged from the face of creation by a thick blinding rain. A waggon was crawling across the nearer and lower bridge, and the whole fabric rocked under its weight.

'Nobody will dream of going to the cathedral to-night,' said Sir Vernon.

But the waiter in attendance declared that everyone would go. There would be a concert on the great organ from eight to nine. The cathedral was close by; there would be a carriage in waiting at ten minutes to eight to convey those guests who graciously deigned to patronise the concert, for which the waiter was privileged to dispose of tickets. Furthermore, the storm would assuredly abate before long. It was but a thunder-shower.

Daphne stood at the window watching the thunder-shower, which seemed to be drowning the lower town and flooding the river. The rain came down in torrents; the thunder roared and bellowed over the hills; the chainwork of the suspension bridge creaked and groaned.

Sir Vernon protested that the storm made him nervous, and retired to his room, leaving the young people to do as they pleased.

They sat in the stormy dusk sipping their coffee, ready to put on their hats and be off the minute the carriage was announced. Daphne wore a gown of some creamy-white material, which gave her a ghostly look in the gloom.

'You have heard this famous organ, Lina,' she said. 'Is it really worth stopping at Fribourg on purpose to hear it when, with a little more time and trouble, one might get half-way up Mont Blanc?'

'It is a wonderful organ; but you will be able to judge for yourself in a few minutes.'

'We should have been getting near Chamounix by this time, if we had started by this morning's diligence,' sighed Daphne.

'Restless, unsatisfied soul! still harping on the mountain,' said Gerald.

'I have seen him, at least,' exclaimed Daphne, clasping her hands; 'that is something. Far, far away, like a glimpse of another world: but still I have seen him. Shall we see him again to-morrow, do you think, on the way to Interlaken?'

'I'm afraid not. To-morrow I shall have the honour to introduce you to the Jungfrau.'

'I don't care a straw for her,' exclaimed Daphne contemptuously.

'What, not for Manfred's mountain? Can you, who have so devoured your Byron, be indifferent to the background of that gloomy individual's existence?'

'There is an interest in that, certainly; but Mont Blanc is my beau-ideal of a mountain.'

Here the carriage was announced. The two girls put on their hats and wraps, soft China crape and gray camel's-hair shawls, and hurried down to the hall. The rain was still falling, the thunder still grumbling amidst distant hills. They crowded into the fly, and were jolted over stony and uneven ways to the cathedral.

They went in at a narrow little door to a great dark church, with solitary lamps dotted about here and there in the gloom. Everything had a mysterious look; the richly-carved oak, the shrines, the chapels, the shrouded altar far away at the end.

There were, perhaps, a hundred people sitting about in high narrow pews with massive carved oak seats, sitting here and there in a scattered way, all wrapped in shadow and gloom, silent, overawed, expectant.

Madoline and Daphne walked side by side up the long nave, between two lines of oaken seats, the two men following; then midway between the organ and the altar, they went into one of the pews—Lina first, then Daphne. She had been sitting there a minute or so looking about the dim dark church before she discovered that it was Gerald, and not Edgar, who sat by her side. Edgar had taken the seat behind them.

They sat there for five or ten minutes, hushed and listening; the rain splashing on the roof, the distant thunder reverberating; nothing to be seen in the vast building but those yellow lamps gleaming here and there, and patching with faint light an isolated statue, or a pulpit, or a clustered column.

At last, when the silence, broken only by faintest whisperings among the expectant audience, had endured for what seemed a weary while, the organ pealed forth in a grand burst of sound, which swept along the arched roof, and filled the church with music. Then after that crash of mighty chords came tenderest phrases, a flowing melody that sank low as a whisper, and then that strain of almost supernatural likeness to the human voice rose up above the legato arpeggios of the accompaniment, and thrilled every ear—tender, angelic, a divine whisper of love and melancholy. Daphne had risen from her seat, and stood with her arms resting upon the massive woodwork in front of her, gazing up through the darkness towards that glimmering spot of light yonder, near the arch of the roof, which showed where the organ was, far away, mysterious.

Oh, that heavenly voice, with its soul-moving sadness! A rush of tears streamed from her eyes; she stretched out her

hands unconsciously, as if yearning for some human touch to break the mournful spell of that divine sorrow, and the hand nearest Gerald was clasped in the darkness; clasped by a warm strong hand which held it and kept it—kept it without a struggle, for, alas! it lay unresistingly in his. They drew a little nearer to each other involuntarily, shudderingly happy—with the deep sense of an unpardonable guilt, a shameful treason; yet forgetting everything except that vain foolish love against which both had fought long and valiantly.

A peal of thunder on the organ within, an answering peal from the storm without. The mimic tempest blended itself with heaven's own artillery; and at the terrible sound those guilty creatures in the church let go each other's hands. Daphne clasped hers before her face, and sank on her knees.

'Pity me and help me, O God!' she prayed, and looking up she saw just above her in a marble niche the image of the Mother of God: and in this moment of temptation and self-abandonment, it seemed to her a natural thing that women should ask a woman's mediation in their hour of sorrow.

A funeral hymn of Sebastian Bach's pealed from the organ with an awful grandeur which thrilled every listener; and then came a silence, and after that the low murmur of the storm dying away in the distance, from the overture to 'William Tell,' the flutelike tones of the '*Ranz des Vaches*,' telling of pastoral valleys and solemn mountains, a life of Arcadian innocence and peace.

With those lighter, gayer strains the concert ended, and they all went slowly and silently out of the church. The storm was over, and the moon was breaking through dark clouds.

'Don't let us go back in that jingling abomination of a fly,' said Gerald, striding on over the wet pavement, leaving the two girls to follow with Edgar Turchill.

They picked their way through the streets. The town was all dark and quiet, save for a glimmering yellow candle here and there under a gable; there was none of the brightness and out-of-door life of a French town. A couple of omnibuses and a fly or two carried off the people who had been in the cathedral to their several hotels.

Gerald Goring was waiting for them in front of the Zährringer.

'What made you hurry on so?' asked Madoline wonderingly.

'Did I hurry? I think it was you others who crawled. That music irritated my nerves a little. It is full of studied effects; the organist has trained himself to play upon the emotions of his audience, now soaring to the seraph choir, now going down to the depths of Pandemonium. The thunderstorm and the organ together would have been too much for anybody.

Oh, pray don't go indoors yet,' he exclaimed, as they were all three moving towards the entrance of the hotel. 'Let us go for a walk on the bridge. Don't you know that after the organ the great feature of Fribourg is the bridge?'

'If we are to be on our way to Interlaken to-morrow, we had better see all we can to-night,' said the practical Edgar.

They went on the bridge; Gerald still walking ahead, and keeping in some wise aloof from them. Daphne had not spoken since they left the cathedral.

'Had the music an unpleasant effect upon you too, dear, that you are so silent?' Madoline asked, as they two walked side by side.

'It was only too beautiful,' answered Daphne.

'And you are glad we came here.'

'No. Yes. I would rather have been half-way up Mont Blanc.'

'Poor child! But that is a pleasure in reserve for another holiday. I know Edgar will take you wherever you like to go.'

'Do you think so? What a dance I shall lead him!' cried Daphne with a mocking laugh. 'I shall not be content with Mont Blanc or the Matterhorn. I shall insist upon seeing all the extinct volcanoes, the wonderful fiery mountains that have burned themselves out. Cotopaxi is about the mildest hill he will be invited to climb.'

Mr. Turchill had dropped into the background, and was quietly enjoying his cigar, unaware of the pleasures in store for him. Gerald walked ever so far ahead, cigarless, a gloomy figure.

'I'm afraid either the thunder or the organ has given Gerald one of his nervous headaches,' said Lina anxiously.

The moon showed herself fitfully athwart hurrying clouds, now lighting up hills and watch-towers, river and rugged ravine, with a wild Salvator-Rosa-esque effect, now hidden altogether, and leaving all in gloom. Midway upon the bridge Madoline and Daphne stopped, and stood looking down into the hollow below, where the quiet sleeping town was dimly visible, with its quaint street lamps, and rare gleams of light from narrow casements, and stony ways shining after the rain. Here, when they had stood for some minutes, Edgar joined them, having finished his cigar, and he and Madoline began to talk about the place; he questioning, she expounding its features.

While they two were talking, Gerald came slowly back, and stood by Daphne's side, a few paces apart from the others. She said never a word. They stood side by side for some minutes like statues. She was wondering if he could hear the passionate throbbing of her heart, which would not be stilled.

They were standing thus, as if bound by a spell, when a heavy waggon came creeping slowly along the bridge, making

the spot on which they stood tremble and sway under their feet.

'We are hanging by a thread between time and eternity,' said Gerald, drawing closer to her. 'What if the thread were to snap, and drop us, hand in hand, into the black gulf of death?'

She did not shudder at the thought, but turned and looked at him in the moonlight, with a strange sad smile.

'Would you be glad?' he asked softly.

'Yes,' she answered, between a sigh and a whisper, still looking up at him with that pathetic smile; and his eyes looked fondly down into hers, losing themselves in the depth of a fathomless mystery.

'Do you know that this bridge is the second longest in the world, three hundred yards long, and a hundred and sixty-eight feet above the river?' asked Edgar Turchill's matter-of-fact tones, as he walked towards them, cheerful, contented, pleased with himself and all the world.

'For God's sake spare us a gush of secondhand Baedeker,' cried Gerald with intense irritation. 'As if any living soul, except a Cook's tourist, could care how many feet or how many yards long a bridge is. It is the effect one values, the general idea that one is on that very bridge of Al Sirât, laid over the midst of hell, and finer than a hair, and sharper than the edge of a sword, over which the righteous must pass to Mahomet's paradise. It is the notion of man's audacity in making perilous ways that is really delightful. When that waggon went across just now, I thought the last straw was being laid, and we were all going.'

Edgar came round to Daphne with a calm air of proprietorship which made her shudder.

'What an interesting evening we have had!' he said.

'Very.'

'You look pale and tired. Has it all been too much for you?' he asked tenderly.

'I think that organ would be too much for anyone.'

'Do you know—I am no judge, and you mustn't laugh at me for expressing an opinion—I hardly thought it equal, as an organ, to the one at St. Paul's. I took my mother there once when all the charity children were assembled. I can't tell you what a grand sight it was, the dome crowded with their fresh young faces.'

'Oh, for pity's sake don't talk about it,' cried Daphne, almost hysterically. 'To compare that dark solemn cathedral, with just a few people dotted about among the shadows, and the thunder pealing over the roof—to compare such a scene with that pagan St. Paul's, and the dome crowded with rosy-cheeked children, all white caps and pinafores and yellow worsted stockings!'

'I was talking of the organ,' replied Edgar, somewhat offended.

'Then why introduce the charity children? Oh, please let my thoughts dwell upon that dark church to-night; let me remember the music, the darkness.'

'Daphne, dearest one, you are crying,' exclaimed Edgar, startled at the sound of a stifled sob.

'Who would not cry at such music?'

'But so long after. You are nervous and hysterical.'

'I am only tired. Please don't worry me,' retorted Daphne fretfully, wrapping herself tightly in her soft gray shawl, and quickening her pace.

She said not a word more till they were inside the Zähringer Hof, when she wished the other three a brief good-night, declaring herself utterly worn out, and tripped lightly upstairs to her room on the second storey. Madoline's room was next her sister's, and when she went up a few minutes later, and knocked at the door of communication between the two rooms, Daphne excused herself from opening it.

'I'm dreadfully sleepy, dear,' she said; 'please leave me alone for to-night!'

'Willingly, dearest, if you are sure you are not ill.'

'Not the least in the world.'

'And there is nothing you want Mowser to do for you?'

'Nothing. She has unpacked my things. I have everything I want.'

'Then good-night, and God bless you.'

'Good-night,' answered Daphne, but invoked no blessing upon the sister she loved so well. Prayer breathed from such a guilty heart would be almost blasphemy.

She walked up and down the room for a long time, up and down, up and down, her soul filled with ineffable joy. Yes; guilty, treacherous, vile, ungrateful as she knew herself to be, she could not stifle that wild sense of happiness, the rapture of knowing herself beloved by the man she loved. Nothing but evil could ever come out of that love; nothing but struggle, and sorrow, and pain; yet it was deep delight to have been loved, the one perfect joy that was possible for her upon this earth. To have missed it would have been never to have lived: and now death might come when it would. She had lived her life; she had had her day.

That this love was a thing of guilt, a scorpion to be crushed and trodden under her foot, she never questioned. Not for an instant did it enter into her mind that she could profit by Gerald Goring's inconstancy, that she was to take to herself the lover whose faith had been violated by to-night's revelation. Never did it occur to her that any alteration in his future or

hers was involved in the admissions which each had made to the other.

'He knows that I love him; he knows how weak and vile I am,' she said to herself. 'If Lina were to know too? If she were to see me with the mask off my face, what a monster of perfidy and ingratitude I should seem to her! Oh, I should die of shame. I could never endure the discovery. And to make her unhappy—her to whom I owe so much, my dearest, my best, the guardian angel of my life. Oh, Lina, Lina, if you knew!'

She flung herself on her knees beside the bed, and, with hands clasped above her head, breathed her passionate prayer:

'Let me die to-night. Oh, Thou who knowest how sinful and weak I am, let me die to-night!'

CHAPTER XXVII.

'I MAY NOT DON AS EVERY PLOUGHMAN MAY.'

A CHAMBERMAID brought Daphne a letter at half-past six o'clock next morning. She had fallen asleep in the summer sunlight after a night of almost utter sleeplessness; the warm air blowing in upon her across the hills on the opposite side of the river; the noises of the early awakened town floating up from the valley below.

She started from her pillow, scared and agitated at the sound of the chambermaid's knock, and took the letter with a trembling hand. Gerald's writing! She knew it too well: yet this was the first letter he had ever addressed to her.

'How dare he write to me?' she exclaimed angrily, as she tore open the envelope.

The letter began with no fond words of endearment. The writer dashed at his meaning with passionate directness, with feeling too intense to be eloquent.

'Tell me what I am to do. After last night, my future, my life, are in your hands. Both belong to you if you will have them. Shall I break the truth to Lina? Shall I tell her how, little by little, in spite of myself, my heart has been beguiled away from that calm affection which was once all sufficient for the joy of life; how a new and passionate love has replaced the old; and that, although I shall honour, respect, and admire her as the first and best of women till the end of my days, I am no longer, I never can be again, her lover? I think, Daphne, that the hard, outspoken, brutal truth may be the wisest and best. Let us look Fate in the face. Neither you nor I can ever be happy asunder. Will the sacrifice of my happiness secure Lina's?

Answer me from your heart of hearts, my beloved, as you answered me on the bridge last night.'

There was not an instant's doubt in Daphne's mind as to how this letter must be answered. Lina's happiness sacrificed to hers! Lina, so good, so pure-minded, in all things so much above her, to be made miserable, in order that she might triumph in a successful treachery!

'I don't think the most virtuous person in the world could loathe me worse than I should loathe myself, if I were to do this thing,' she said to herself resolutely.

She sat down by the open window, wrapped in her loose white dressing-gown, her soft golden hair falling over her shoulders like a veil, her cheeks pale, her eyes heavy, an image of youthful sorrow.

'Not for this wide world,' she wrote, answering Gerald Goring's question as directly as he had asked it, 'not to be completely and unspeakably happy would I rob my sister of her happiness; not if it could be done without making me a monster of ingratitude, the most treacherous and despicable of women. All you and I have to do is to forget our folly of last night, and to be true, each of us, to the promises we have made. You would be, indeed, a loser, condemned to pay a life-long penalty for your foolishness, if you could barter such a flower as Madoline for such a weed as me. Be true to her, and you will find your reward in that truth. Do you know how good she is; how priceless in her purity and love; and could you let her go for my sake—for a creature who is compounded of faults and inconsistencies, caprices, self-will; a creature with no more soul than Undine? Remember how long she has loved you; think how much she is above you in the beauty of her character; how fitted she is to make your home happy, your life nobler and better than it could ever be without her. Why, if, in some moment of madness, you were to surrender her love, your life to come would be one long regret for having lost her. Forget, as I shall forget; be true, as I will be true, heaven helping me; and let me write myself, without a blush, in this my first, and, perhaps, my last letter to you,—Your Sister, DAPHNE.'

Her eyes were streaming with tears as she wrote. Every word came from her heart. There was no duplicity of thought, no lurking hope that Gerald might refuse to be ruled by her. She wrote to him faithfully, honestly, resolutely, her heart and mind exalted by her intense love of her sister. And when the letter was sealed and given to the chambermaid—who must have wondered a little at this outbreak of letter-writing before breakfast as a new development in the British tourist—she stole softly

to the door leading into Madoline's room and opened it as noiselessly as she could.

Lina was still asleep, the calm beautiful face turned towards the sunlight, the long dark lashes dropping on the oval cheek, the lips faintly parted. Daphne crept to the bed-side and sat down beside her sister's pillow. Lina awoke and looked up at her.

'My pet, have you been here long? Is it late?' she asked.

'Late for you, love. About half-past seven. I have only this moment come in.'

'How white and haggard you look!' said Lina anxiously. 'Have you had a bad night?'

'I did not sleep particularly well. I seldom can in a strange place.'

'Daphne, I am afraid you are ill—or unhappy. There was something in your manner last night that alarmed me.'

'I am not ill; and I have not felt so happy for a long time as I feel this morning.'

'Why, dearest?'

'Because I have been making good resolutions, and I mean to act upon them.'

'Would it be too much to ask what they are?'

'Oh, a general determination to be very obedient to you, and very respectful to my father, and very tolerant of Edgar's stupidities, and all that kind of thing, don't you know?'

'My darling, I can't bear to hear you talk of Edgar like that. He is so thoroughly good.'

'Yes,' sighed Daphne, with an air of resignation. 'If there were only a little rift in his goodness, I should get on with him so much better. It is dreadful to have to deal with a man whose excellence is always putting one to shame.'

'I think you could be easily worthy of him.'

'No, I couldn't. And if I could I wouldn't. And now I must run away and dress, for I want to explore those hills across the river before breakfast.'

She looked bright and fresh and full of youthful energy an hour afterwards, when she went down to the sitting-room, where Edgar was loafing about wearily, longing for her to appear. Her neat tailor gown of darkest olive cashmere, and coquettish little olive-green toque, set off the pearly tints of her complexion and the brightness of her loosely-coiled hair. She came into the room buttoning a long Swedish glove, the turned-back sleeve showing the round white arm.

'What a fetching get-up,' said Edgar, who was apt to embellish his speech with those flowers of slang which are in everybody's mouth; 'but what is the use of those long gloves tucked away under the sleeve of your gown?'

'No use,' answered Daphne; 'but they're fashionable. I

want you to come and ramble on that hill over there before breakfast. Do you mind ?'

'Mind!' cried Edgar. 'You know I am always delighted to walk with you. But, I say, Daphne, what was the matter with you last night? You were so cross.'

'I know I was; but I am never going to be cross again. I am going to turn over a new leaf. 'I have been wild and wilful, but I am not wilful now.'

'You are always the dearest and best of girls,' answered Edgar fatuously.

They passed Gerald Goring on the stairs. Daphne gave him a friendly nod, just the easiest salutation possible; but her cheek paled as she went by, and her reply to Edgar's next observation was somewhat wide of the mark.

He talked Baedeker to her as they went across the bridge; and he talked Baedeker about the watch-towers; and still again Baedeker when, in the course of their wanderings, they came to a chapel on a height, from whence there was a lovely view, exquisitely beautiful in the clear calm summer morning. They roamed about together till it was time to go back to the ten-o'clock breakfast, by which hour Sir Vernon had resigned himself to the ordeal of facing his family.

After breakfast there came more sight-seeing, Sir Vernon having decided upon going on to Berne by a late afternoon train. So they all set out together in a roomy landau to explore the town and neighbourhood. They went into the arsenal, where a funny old man in a blue blouse showed them ancient and modern gunnery. They saw the venerable lime-tree which stands in front of the Town Hall and the Rathhaus, propped up with wood and stone; a tree which, according to tradition, was originally a twig borne by a young native of Fribourg when he arrived in the town, breathless from loss of blood, to bring the news of the victory of Morat. 'Victory!' he gasped, and died.

Gerald, more than usually cynical this morning, declined to believe in either the twig or the heroic messenger.

'I always shut my mind against all these romantic stories upon principle,' he said languidly. 'The outcome of all modern research—Mr. Brewer, and all the rest of it—is to prove that none of these delightful traditions has a germ of truth in it. It saves a great deal of trouble to begin by disbelieving them.'

They went about the town in rather a dawdling desultory way, looking at the fronts of old houses, at the queer little shops, and finally paused before the church of St. Nicholas, which they had seen so dimly last night. Edgar insisted upon going in, but Daphne would go no farther than the doorway, where she looked respectfully at the bas-reliefs which she was told to admire.

'I saw quite enough of it last night,' she said, when Edgar urged her to go in and explore the interior.

'Why, Daphne, it was too dark for you to see anything.'

'All churches are alike,' she answered impatiently. 'Please don't worry.'

Sir Vernon, who happened to be within earshot, looked at his daughter curiously, wondering at this development of modern manners. Could a pearly delicacy of complexion, luminous eyes of that dark gray which is almost violet, and bright gold hair, quite make amends for this utter want of courtesy? But Edgar appeared perfectly content to be so treated: and it was Edgar who was most concerned in the matter.

They dawdled away a long morning seeing the town and driving about the somewhat pastoral landscape which surrounds it, lunched late, and started at five o'clock for Berne, where they arrived at the Berner Hof in time for a late dinner. Daphne grumbled a little on the way, protesting against the landscape between Fribourg and Berne as a relapse into English pastoral scenery.

'What do I want with meadows, and orchards, and cottages?' she exclaimed. 'I can see those in England. If it were not for the cows living on the ground floor, and the fodder being carried up to the roof by those queer slanting covered ways, there wouldn't be a shade of difference between the houses here and those at home, except that these are ever so much dirtier.'

'You ought to have come a few million years ago, when Switzerland was a glacial chaos,' said Gerald.

The Berner Hof pleased Sir Vernon by its spaciousness and air of English comfort, but it impressed Daphne as an hotel which would have been more in keeping with Liverpool or Manchester.

'I had quite made up my mind that in Switzerland we should stop at wooden *chalets* perched upon mountain ledges, with an impending avalanche always in view, and the "*Ranz des Vaches*" sounding in the distance all day long.'

'There are such hostelries,' answered Gerald; 'but I think, if you found yourself at one of them, you would be rather inclined to wish yourself at the Berner Hof, or the Beau Rivage.'

Next day was the first Tuesday in the month, and the occasion of the monthly market, a grand assemblage of small dealers from the adjacent country.

They all went out directly after breakfast, and proceeded straight to the noble central street, a mile in length, which under various names pierces the town in a straight unbroken line from one end to the other. Very old and quaint are the

houses in this long street, many of them built over arcades, under which the foot-passengers walk, and within whose arches the market-people set out their stalls. The drapery stalls, gay with many-coloured handkerchiefs fluttering in the summer air; the jewellers' stalls, all twinkling and flashing with that silver trinketry which is a national institution, chains of endless length, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, glittering in the sun; stalls loaded with fruits and vegetables; stalls of gaudy-coloured pottery, jugs and jars of queerest, quaintest shapes; and up and down the stony street cows and oxen being led perpetually, meek, submissive, gentle, beautiful, in an endless procession; while every here and there under a countryman's cart the patient dogs of burden lay at rest, placid but watchful, faithful guardians of the master's property. It was a scene of picturesque and national life which pleased Daphne immensely. She had never seen such a market before, never seen so long a street, except the monotonous length of a Parisian boulevard as she was being jolted along in a fly from station to station. Here she saw the people in their national costume. Here Switzerland seemed really Swiss.

She flew from stall to stall, admiring, selecting, bargaining, wanting to buy a barrowful of red and orange pots and pans.

'They would look so lovely in the corridor at South Hill, on high brackets,' she said.

'I'm afraid the brackets would have to be very high,' answered Lina, smiling at her.

'I suppose you mean that for a sneer,' retorted Daphne, 'but if Mr. Burne Jones, or Mr. Rosetti, or Mr. Morris were to say those pots and pans were the right thing, there would be an eruption of them over the walls of every fashionable room in England. I consider them positively lovely. And as for the silver chains, I shall never live without one round my neck.'

'Come and make your selection,' said Edgar, pointing to one of the biggest and grandest stalls in the open place near the famous clock-tower, where the cock was to crow, and the figure of grim old Time was to turn his glass, and all manner of wonderful things were to happen just before the striking of the hour. This stall showed the best array of silver trinketry which they had seen yet, and the country people were clustered about it, gazing at the bright new silver, and a good deal at golden-haired Daphne in her creamy Indian silk gown, a radiant figure under a creamy silk umbrella.

'Choose the prettiest, Daphne, and wear it for my sake,' said Edgar, with his portly leather purse in his hand, an English pigeon offering himself up to be plucked.

'*Combien?*' he asked, rather proud of his readiness with a

foreign language, pointing to the handsomest of the chains, a cluster of many slender chainlets, about three yards long.

'*Wie viel?*' asked Daphne, with a compassionate glance at her affianced.

'It is ver sheep,' answered the vendor, showing a disgusting familiarity with the English tongue. 'Gut und sheep, sehr schön, ver prurty, funf pound Englees.'

'Five pounds!' screamed Daphne: 'why, I thought it would be about five shillings! Pray come away, Mr. Turchill. They see we are English.'

She turned from the stall indignantly, and marched across to look at the fountain, where the gigantic figure of an ogre, in the act of dropping a child into the yawning cavern of his jaws, stands out against the tall white houses, balconied, jalousied, like a bit of Parisian boulevard made picturesque by a dash of Swiss quaintness. The vegetables and the pottery stalls, and the fluttering cotton handkerchiefs were grouped all about the fountain, a confusion of vivid colour.

'That is something like a statue,' cried Daphne, looking up unblinkingly at the giant grinning at her through a warm hazy atmosphere. 'A dear old thing which recalls the fairy-tales of one's childhood, instead of a stupid old Anglo-Indian general, whom nobody ever heard of, riding a tame old horse. Why don't we have Kindlifressers and other fairy-tale statues in the London streets? They would make London ever so much livelier.'

Here Edgar came after her, carrying a small box neatly papered and tied up, which he put into her hand.

'May you never wear heavier fetters than these!' he said, having composed the little speech as he came along.

'What,' she exclaimed, 'did you actually buy the chain after all? Well, I do despise you. Could you not see that the man was swindling you?'

'He was not so bad as you think. I only gave him three pounds for the chain, and I believe it is worth as much as that. I should think it cheap at thirty if you were pleased with it,' he added, with homely tenderness.

'Oh, you poor predestined victim to extortion,' exclaimed Daphne, looking at him with a serio-comic air. 'Such a man as you ought never to go about without a keeper. However, as you have been so good as to allow yourself to be fleeced for my sake, I accept the chain with pleasure, and will wear it as the badge of my future captivity.'

She shot a swift side-glance at Gerald as she spoke, curious to see how he took this direct allusion to an engagement which it had been her habit somewhat to ignore. He was standing looking listlessly along the street, interested neither in man nor woman; but though he had an air of utter vacancy, eyes that

saw not, ears that heard not, Daphne detected a quiver of lip and brow, which showed her that the shot had gone home.

Sir Vernon had gone to the museum to look at the pictures, leaving the young people free to wander where they pleased until dinner-time. They went up and down the arched ways, looking at the shops and stalls, the country people, the dogs, the cattle ; then turned aside from this busy thoroughfare, where all the life and commerce of the canton seemed to have concentrated itself, to explore the dusky cathedral, where all was silence, and coolness, and repose. There was one great disappointment for Daphne. The grand panoramic picture of the Alps, for which the minster terrace is celebrated, was not on view to-day. The mountains hid themselves behind a gauzy veil, a warm vapour which thickened the air above the old city.

'I can't think what I have done to offend the Alps,' cried Daphne petulantly. 'They seem to bear a grudge against me. They wouldn't show me their frosty pows at Geneva, and they won't at Berne. I am not going to break my heart about them, however. Please let us get the cathedral over as fast as we can, and go and look at the bears. I am dying to see the live bears ; for I have seen so many inanimate ones in stone, and wood, and iron, that I seem to have bears on the brain.'

They were standing in the open square in front of the cathedral, looking up at the bronze statue of Rudolph von Erlach, with the four seated bears at its base. They went into the church presently, and admired the fifteenth-century stained glass, and sculptured Pietas, and the choir stalls. As they were leaving the church, they saw a man and a woman going quietly into the vestry, preceded by the minister in his black gown.

'A wedding evidently,' whispered Edgar to Daphne. 'Wouldn't you like to see a Swiss wedding ?'

'Do you think they are going to be married ? What a sober idea of matrimony ! I should have thought a Swiss wedding would have been like a scene in an opera.'

An inquiry of the verger proved that it was really a wedding, so they all crept quietly into the spacious vestry, and stood in the background, while the priest tied the knot according to the Calvinistic manner.

It was not a grandoise or thrilling ceremonial, yet there was a certain sober earnestness in its very simplicity. The rite, shorn of all ornament, was a religious rite performed with all the grave businesslike straightforwardness of a civil agreement. Matrimony thus approached wore a somewhat appalling aspect : no sweet harmony of boyish voices shrilling a bridal hymn ; no mighty organ exploding suddenly in the crashing chords of Mendelssohn's Wedding March ; only a man and woman standing before a priest in a naked stony vestry ; a priest who inter-

rogated them coldly, with his eyes on his book, very much as if he had been hearing them their Catechism. The man had a dull indifferent look, and there was that in the bearing and appearance of the dowdily-dressed woman which hinted that the marriage was an after-thought.

Daphne shuddered as she came out of the sunless vestry.

'That is not my idea of a quiet wedding,' she said. 'Please let us go to the bears: I am dying to see something cheerful.'

They went back to the crowded arcades, the stalls, the processional cattle, and all the life and bustle of a monthly market, and down the whole length of the street, till they found themselves on a bridge that spanned a deep hollow between two hills. On one side of the bridge they looked down into the cattle market, where a multitude of blue blouses, of every shade and tone, from the vivid azure garment bought yesterday, to the faded and patched coat of age and poverty, mixed up with the brown, and cream, and roan, and dun of the cows and oxen, made a wonderful harmony in blues and browns. On the other side there was a famous bear-pit, where half-a-dozen mangy-looking animals are maintained in a state of inglorious repose for the honour of the city.

The bear is not a handsome or a graceful beast, nor does his woolly front beam with intelligence. Yet he has a look of ponderous benevolence, a placid air of being nobody's enemy but his own, which commends him to those who enjoy his acquaintance only at a distance. He is fond of being fed, and has an amiable greediness, which brings him in direct sympathy with his patrons. There is something childlike, too, and distinctly human in his love of buns, to say nothing of his innate aptitude for dancing. These qualities are liable to distract the judgment of his admirers, who forget that at heart he is still a savage, and that his hug is mortal.

Daphne had provided herself with a bag of cakes, and immediately became on the friendliest terms with three ragged-looking Bruins who were squatting on their haunches, ready to receive the favours of an admiring public. She would not believe Baedeker's story of the English officer, who fell into the den, and was killed by these woolly monsters, after a desperate fight for life.

'I couldn't credit anything unkind of them,' she protested. 'See how patiently that dear thing waits, with his mouth wide open, and how dexterously he catches a bit of roll.'

Even the delight of leaning upon a stone parapet to feed bears in a not too odoriferous den must come to an end at last, and Daphne, having had enough of the national beasts, consented to get into a roomy open carriage which Gerald had found while she was dispensing her favours, to the admiration of half-a-dozen country people, who were leaning lazily against

the parapet, and wondering at the beauty of the two English girls in their cool delicate-hued raiment.

There was plenty to admire in the neighbourhood of Berne, albeit the Alps were in hiding, and after a light luncheon at a confectioner's in one of the arcades, they drove about till it was time to dress for dinner.

They started early on the next afternoon for Thun, and between Berne and Thun the Jungfrau first revealed herself in all her virginal beauty—whiter, purer than all the rest of the mountain world—to Daphne's delighted eyes. Never could she take her fill of gazing on that divine pinnacle, that heaven-aspiring mount, rising above a cluster of satellite hills, like Jupiter surrounded by his moons.

'If you told me that on that very mountain-top Moses saw God, I should believe you,' cried Daphne, deeply moved.

'I am sorry to say the pinnacle on which Jehovah revealed Himself to His chosen mouthpiece is a shabby affair in comparison with yonder peak, a mere hillock of seven thousand feet or so,' said Gerald, looking up from the day before yesterday's *Times*.

'You have seen it?'

'I have stood on Serbâl, and Gebel Mousa, and Ras Sasâfeh, the three separate mountain-tops which contend for the honour of having been trodden by the feet of the Creator.'

'How delightful to have seen so much of this world!'

'And to have so little left in this world to see,' answered Gerald; 'there is always the reverse of the shield.'

'It will make it all the pleasanter for you to settle down at Goring Abbey,' said Daphne, assuming her most practical tone. 'You will not be tormented by the idea of all the lovely spots of earth, the wonderful rivers and forests and mountains which you have not seen, as Edgar and I must be at dear old Hawksyard. But we mean to travel immensely, do we not, Edgar?'

Another distinct allusion to her coming life, the near approaching time when she and Edgar would be one. The Squire of Hawksyard smiled delightedly at this recognition of the bond.

'I am sure to do whatever you wish, and go wherever you like,' he answered; 'but I am tremendously fond of home, one's own fireside, don't you know, and one's own stable.'

'And one's own china-closet, and one's own linen-presses,' added Daphne, laughing; 'and one's own jams and pickles and raspberry vinegar. Are not those things numbered among the delights of Hawksyard? But I mean you to take me to the Amazon, and when we have thoroughly done the Andes, we'll go over the Isthmus of Panama, and across Mexico, and finish up with the Rockies. They are only a continuation of the same range, don't you know, the backbone of the two Americas.'

Edgar laughed as at an agreeable joke.

'But I mean it,' protested Daphne, with her elbow resting on the ledge of the window, and her eyes devouring the Jungfrau. 'We are going to be a second Mr. and Mrs. Brassey in the way of travelling.'

Mr. Turchill looked somewhat uncomfortable, moved by the thought of a hunting-stable running to seed at home, while he, a wretched sailor at the best of times, lay tossing in some southern archipelago, all among dusky islanders, and reduced to a fishy and vegetable diet. If Daphne were in earnest the sacrifice would have to be made. Upon that point he was certain. Never could he resist that capricious creature; never could he deny her a pleasure, or beat down her airy whims with the sledge-hammer of common sense.

'I believe we shall be one of the most foolish couples in Christendom,' he said aloud: 'but I think we shall be one of the happiest.'

'A girl must be very hard-hearted who could not be happy with you, Edgar,' said Madoline, looking at him with a frank sisterly smile. 'You are so thoroughly good and kind.'

'Ah, but goodness and kindness don't always score, you know,' he replied, with a laugh in which there was just a shade of sadness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'LOVE IS NOT OLD, AS WHAN THAT IT IS NEW.'

Sir Vernon's party had sailed over the smiling waters of Thun, with its villa-dotted shores, and its low amphitheatre of pastoral hills which form the foreground to the sublimer mountain land. They and all their belongings had been carried into Interlaken by the funny little railway across the Bodelei, that fertile garden-ground between two lakes, which has such an obvious air of having begun life under water. They had seen the long rank of prosperous-looking omnibuses waiting for travellers, and in one of those vehicles they had been carried away from the walnut-tree boulevard, and all the gaiety and fashion of Interlaken, to a rustic road ascending the hill towards the pine-woods, and the mountain peaks far away beyond them, piled up against the sky.

Here at the Jungfraublich they found a charming suite of rooms prepared for them; rooms not gorgeously furnished or richly ornamented, but with long French windows which looked upon as fair a landscape as the eye of man could desire to behold. There rose the Jungfrau in her sublime beauty, above the fertile valley with its lakes and meadows, its *châlets* and

gardens, orchards and *bosquets;* all the simplicity and prettiness of Nature on a small scale lying at the feet of the immensities.

It was twilight when they arrived, and the first star of evening, a faint luminous spot in the blue gray, hovered over the snowy pinnacle of the mountain.

'Oh, you dear!' cried Daphne, to the mountain and not to the star; 'you will be a part of my life from this night. How shall I ever live without you when I go back to Warwickshire?'

'You will have to console yourself with an occasional glimpse of the Wrekin or the Cotswolds,' said Madoline, laughing.

'I am almost sorry I ever came to Switzerland,' murmured Daphne, turning away from the open window with a sigh, when she had gazed, and gazed, as if she would fain have made herself a part of the thing she looked at.

'Why, dearest?' asked Lina.

'Because I shall be always longing to come back here. I shall never be able to tolerate the eternal flatness of home—mole-hills instead of mountains.'

'Hawksyard is rather flat, I admit,' said Edgar, apologetically; 'but it is remarkably well drained. There isn't a healthier house in England.'

'Will not all their modern æstheticism—their Queen Anne worship; their straight garden walks, and straight-backed chairs; their everlasting tea-trays, and Japanese screens, and sunflowers, and dadoes—sicken you after this mountain land?' cried Daphne. 'Such a narrow, petty, childish idea of beauty! Have these perpendicular people ever seen the Jungfrau, do you suppose?'

'Seen her, and outlived her, and ascended to a higher empyrean of art,' answered Gerald. 'You poor child, do you know that you are going into raptures about things which a well-bred person would hardly deign to mention, any more than a Pytchley man would stoop to talk about the Brighton Harriers? This is cockney Switzerland, as cockney as the Trossachs, or Killarney, as Ramsgate and Margate. Everybody knows the Jungfrau, at least by sight; everybody has been at Interlaken. It is the chief rendezvous of the travellers who come in flocks, and are driven from pillar to post like sheep, with an intelligent interpreter playing the part of sheep-dog. I hope you will do the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa before you go home; and then you will be acquainted with a brace of mountains which may be spoken about in polite society.'

'The Jungfrau is good enough for me,' answered Daphne; 'I shall never behold anything more beautiful. Manfred loved her.'

'I beg your pardon, that amiable gentleman did not love anything. "And you, ye mountains," he exclaims, "why are ye

beautiful? I cannot love ye." He does not care for the sun, nor for his fellow-men, nor for his own life. He has all the misanthropy of Hamlet, without Hamlet's unselfish reasons for being misanthropic. However, I suppose to young ladies in their teens he will always appear an interesting character. No doubt you will be starting with your alpenstock at daybreak to-morrow in search of the Witch of the Alps. You will most likely discover her by one of the bridges on the road to Grindelwald, offering dirty bunches of edelweiss, or indifferently fresh milk, to the passers-by.'

'Daphne is going nowhere without me,' said Lina, laying her hand caressingly upon her sister's shoulder. 'She is too enthusiastic to be trusted in strange places. You will not go anywhere alone, will you, darling?'

'I will do nothing in this world to vex you,' answered Daphne earnestly, with the straightest, clearest look in her lovely eyes.

Gerald Goring heard her tone, and saw that direct and truthful gaze. He knew well how much that little speech meant; how grave and complete was the promise in those few words. Yes, she would be true, she would be faithful: were it at the cost of two broken hearts. He began to perceive that he had underrated the moral force of this seemingly volatile creature; physically so fragile, so made up of whims and fancies, yet, where honour and affection were concerned, so staunch.

Later in the evening, after they had dined, and Sir Vernon had retired for the night, Mr. Goring loitered alone in the terraced garden of the hotel. The mountain, faintly touched with silvery light from a young moon, rose in front of him, and below glimmered those earthlier lights which told of human life—yellow candle-light in wooden *chalets*; the flare of the gas yonder, faint in the distance, where the walnut-tree walk was all alive with the light of its hotels and its modest Kursaal. A fitful gust of music from the band came floating up the valley. Behind him the hotel stood out whitely against a background of dark pine-woods; lights in many windows. Those ten lighted windows in a row on the first storey belonged to Sir Vernon's apartments. He looked up, vaguely wondering which was Daphne's window. That one, at the end of the range, most likely—the casement wide open to the night and the mystic mountain-land. While he was deciding this a white-robed figure stepped lightly out upon the balcony, and stood there, gazing at the far-away peaks faintly outlined against a purple sky.

There were three or four other loungers upon the terrace, each with his cigar, the luminous point of which gleamed here and there among the bushes like a glowworm. There was no reason why Daphne should distinguish Gerald Goring from the rest, as he sat in an angle of the stone balustrade, half hidden

in the shadow of an acacia, lonely, dissatisfied ; yet it was painful to him, in his egotism, to see her standing there, immovable, a lovely statuesque form, with upturned face and clasped hands, worshipping the blind, dumb, unresponsive goddess Nature, and all unconscious that he, her lover, with a human heart to feel and to suffer, was looking up at her with passionate yearning from the dewy darkness below.

'She does not care a jot for me ; she is harder than the nether millstone,' he said to himself savagely. 'Yet I once thought her the softest, most yielding thing in creation—a being so impressionable that she might be moulded by a thought of mine. I feared the touching of our spirits, as if I were flame and she tinder. Yet our souls have touched, and kindled, and burst into a blaze ; and she has strength of mind to pluck herself away unscathed, not a feather of her purity scorched, from that fiery contact.'

He sat in his shadowy corner, lazily finishing his cigar, and looking up at the figure in the balcony till it slowly melted from his gaze, and a muslin curtain was dropped across the open window. Then he left the garden and wandered away up the wooded hillside, by narrow winding paths, which seemed to have no particular direction, but to have been worn by the footprints of other idlers as purposeless—it might be as unhappy—as he. He stayed in the shadowy wood for a long time, smoking a second cigar, and preferring that perfumed solitude, and his own gloomy thoughts to any diversion which the little lighted town down in the green hollow yonder could have furnished him. And then, at last, on the verge of midnight, when all the lighted windows of the Jungfraublich had gone out one after another, and the big white barrack looked blank and bare, he turned and groped his way back to it through the sinuous woodland paths, and was admitted by a sleepy porter, who was mildly reproachful at having been kept up so long.

A grand excursion had been planned for the next day, Sir Vernon approving the scheme, and politely requesting to be left out of it.

'You wouldn't know what to do with me,' he said. 'I should be a burden to you, and I should be terribly tiresome to myself. I have letters to write which will occupy me all the morning, and in the afternoon I can stroll down to the Kursaal, or sit in the garden here, or take a little walk in the wood. You will be back before nine o'clock, I daresay.'

Madoline was loth to leave her father for so long a day. He was an invalid, and required a good deal of attention, she reminded him.

'There is Jinman, my dear ; he can do all I want. Of course it is much pleasanter for me to be waited on by you ; but Jinman is very handy, and will serve on a pinch.'

'But all those letters, dear father,' urged Lina, looking at an alarming bundle of businesslike documents. 'Could I not help you with those? Could not the greater part of them stand over till we are at Montreux?'

'Some of them might, perhaps; but some must be answered to-day. Don't worry yourself about me, Lina; I know you have set your heart upon going up to Mürren with Daphne.'

'I should like to show her the scenery which delighted me so years ago,' answered Lina; 'but I can't bear the idea of leaving you for so long.'

'My dear child, you are talking nonsense,' said Sir Vernon testily. 'In October you are going to leave me altogether.'

'Yes; but I shall not be leaving you in a strange hotel; and I shall be so near, at your beck and call, always.'

Sir Vernon, having made up his mind to the sacrifice, carried it out with consistent fortitude. He himself ordered the carriage which was to carry off his beloved daughter, with those other three who were comparatively indifferent to him.

They drove away from the hotel immediately after a seven o'clock breakfast, in the clear light of morning, while the fields and hedges were still dewy, and the earth wore her fairest freshest colours and breathed out her sweetest odours. Soon after they left the village they came to the road beside the deep and rapid Lutschine, which cleaves the heart of the valley. On either side rose a lofty wall of hills, slope above slope, climbing up to heaven, clothed to the very summit with tall feathery firs, some of stupendous size, the sombre tints of these patriarchs relieved by the tender green of the young larches; the White Lutschine rushing on all the while, a wild romantic stream, tumbling and seething over masses of stone. Here by the river bank they stopped to see the murder-stone, an inscription cut on the face of the rock, which tells how at this spot a brother slew his brother.

It is a lovely drive, so lovely that it is hardly possible for the mind to be distracted from its fairness by any other thought. Daphne sat silent in her corner of the carriage, drinking in the beauty of the scene, her gaze wandering upward and upward to those mighty hills, those forests upon the edge of heaven, so remote, so inaccessible in their loveliness, the greenery pierced every here and there by narrow streamlets that came trickling down like wandering flashes of silvery light. Solitude and silence were the prevailing expression of that exquisite scene. The cattle had all been removed to the upper regions, to remote pastures on the borderland of the everlasting snow-fields; of human life there were few signs; only a distant *châlet* showing here and there, perched on some ledge of the green hills. The voice of the river was the one sound that broke the summer stillness.

There was a pleasant contrast to this solemn loneliness, this silent loveliness of Nature without humanity, when the carriage drove jingling up to the inn at Lauterbrunnen, where there was all the life and bustle of a country inn at fair-time or market. Many vehicles and horses in the open space in front of the house; a long verandah, under which travellers were sitting resting after an early morning tramp from Mürren or Grindelwald; guides, with swarthy sunburnt faces, homely, good-natured, unintelligent, sitting at ease upon a long stone parapet, waiting their chances; a great fuss and noise of taking horses in and bringing horses out; a call for hay and water; a few people strolling down the road to look at the Staubach, and telling each other admiringly, inspired by the prophet Baedeker, that it is the highest unbroken fall in the world. It was very glorious in the morning sunshine, a dim rainbow-tinted arc of spray; and Daphne thought of the Witch of the Alps, and how she had worn this cloud-like fall as a garment, when she showed herself to Manfred. There was no inn there in those far-away romantic days—no odour of bad brandy and worse wine; no tourists; no cockneyism of any kind—only the sweet pastoral valley in its lonely beauty, and the solemn regions of mountain and snow rising whitely above its placid greenery, and walling it in from the commonplace earth.

There was a halt of half an hour or so at Lauterbrunnen, just long enough to pay proper homage to the Staubach, and to explore the queer little primitive village, and for Daphne to burden herself with a number of souvenirs, all more or less of a staggy or goaty order, bargaining sturdily for the same with the sunburnt proprietor of a covered stall opposite the inn, whose honesty in no case demanded more than thrice the amount he was prepared to accept. By the time Daphne had concluded her transactions with this merchant of mountain *bric-à-brac*, and had made herself spiky with paper-knives and walking-sticks of the horny kind—which treasures she reluctantly surrendered to the safe keeping of an inn servant, to be packed in the carriage against her return—the steeds were ready to convey the two ladies up the mountain-path, the gentlemen being bent upon going up on foot. Daphne wanted to walk, and had just bought herself an alpenstock with that view, but Lina would not let her undertake the journey; so she handed Edgar her alpenstock, and allowed herself to be hoisted into a queer kind of saddle, with a railing round it, and Lina being similarly mounted, they began the ascent, going through more mud, just at starting, than seemed compatible with such perfect summer weather.

'I hope, Edgar,' said Daphne gravely, 'that you won't take your idea of my horsemanship from my performance on this animal, and in this saddle, or else I am afraid you'll never let me ride Black Pearl.'

Edgar laughingly assured her that her seat was perfection, even in the railed-in saddle, and that she should have the best horse money could buy, or judgment secure.

The two young men went on before them, leaping from stone to stone, and making great play with their alpenstocks as they bounded across the streamlets which frequently intersected their path. It was a narrow, narrow way, winding up the shoulder of the hill, now in sunlight, now in shade; the summer air sweetened with the scent of the pine-trees; pine-clad slopes above, pine-clad slopes below, sometimes gently slanting downward, a green hill-side which little children might play upon, sometimes a sheer descent, terrible to the eye; *châlets* dotting the meadows far below; villages spread out on the greensward of the valley, and looking like clusters of toy houses; the road winding through the valley like a silver ribbon; the awful Jungfrau range facing them, as they ascended, in all its unspeakable majesty; grander, and yet ever grander, as they came nearer to it.

Sometimes, as they rode through the pine-trees, they seemed to be riding straight into the snowy mountains; they were so close, so close to that white majesty. Then as they came suddenly into the open, those airy peaks receded, remote as ever, melting farther and farther away as one rode after them, like a never-to-be-reached fairyland.

'I could almost cry with vexation,' exclaimed Daphne after one of these optical illusions. 'I thought we were close to the Jungfrau, and there she stands smiling down at me, with her pallid enigmatical smile, from the very top of the world. Edgar, if you love me, you must take me up that impertinent mountain before I am a year older.'

'You were talking yesterday of the Cordilleras.'

'I know, but we must finish off the Alps first—Mont Blanc, and the Jungfrau, the Schreckhorn, the Rothhorn, the Matterhorn, the Finsteraarhorn, and all the rest of them. I cannot be defied by the insolence of Nature. She has thrown her gauntlet, and I must positively pick it up. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet—and the general experience seems to show that mountains are obstinate things—Mahomet must go to the mountain. I mean to have it out with Mont Blanc before I die.'

'I don't believe a lady has ever done the ascent,' said Edgar, leading his mistress's meek and patient steed along a winding ledge. The animal was a mere infant, rising three, but as free from skittishness as if he had been rising three-and-twenty.

'That shows how densely ignorant you must be of the age you live in,' protested Daphne. 'Be sure that there is nothing in this life which the man of the present can do which the woman of the present won't imitate; and the more essentially masculine the thing is the more certain she is to attempt it.'

'But I hope you don't rank yourself among masculine women, Daphne,' murmured Edgar, drawing protectingly near her, as they turned a sharp corner.

'I don't; but I mean to ascend Mont Blanc.'

They were approaching the village on the height. The Lauterbrunnen valley was sinking deeper and deeper into remoteness, a mere green cleft in the mountains. They had met and passed many people on their way: ladies being carried down by sturdy natives in a kind of sedan-chair, something of the palki species; voyagers struggling upwards with their belongings, with a view to spending some days in the quiet settlement among the snow-peaks; guides jogging by with somebody else's luggage; mules laden with provisions. The guides gave each other a grinning good-day as they passed, and exchanged remarks in a *patois* not very easy to understand; remarks that had a suggestion of being critical, and not altogether commendatory, of the clients at that moment under escort.

'Here we are, up in the skies at last,' cried Daphne, as she sprang lightly to the ground, spurning her lover's proffered aid, and just brushing against the eager arms held out to receive her; 'and oh how dreadfully far away the top of the Jungfrau still is, and how very dirty she looks now we are on a level with her shoulder!'

'It is too late in the year for you to see her in her virginal purity. A good deal of the snow has melted,' said Madoline apologetically.

'But it ought not to melt. I thought I was coming to a region of eternal snow. Why, the lower peaks are horribly streaky and brown. Thank Heaven the Silberhorn still looks dazzlingly white. And is this Mürren? A real mountain village? How I wish we were going to live here for a month.'

'I fancy you would get horribly tired of it,' suggested Gerald Goring.

She did not stay to argue the point, but ordered Edgar to explore the village with her immediately. The big wooden barrack of an hotel, with its bright green blinds and pine balconies, looked down upon her, the common-place type of an advanced civilisation. Young men, all affecting a more or less Alpine-Clubbish air, lounged about in various easy attitudes; young women, in every variety of hat and gauze veil, read Tauchnitz novels, or made believe to be sketching, under artistic-looking umbrellas. Daphne made but a cursory survey of this tourist population before she started off upon her voyage of discovery, with Edgar in delighted attendance on her steps. Madoline and Gerald, who both knew all that there was to be known about Mürren, were content to loiter in the garden of the Hôtel des Alpes, dreamily contemplative of the sublimities around and about them.

'I give you half an hour for your explorations,' said Gerald, as Daphne and her swain departed; 'if you are not back by that time, Lina and I will eat all the luncheon. At this elevation luncheon is not a matter to be trifled with. There are limits to the supplies.'

He went into the hotel to give his orders, while Lina walked slowly up and down one of the terraced pathways, looking at the wild chaos of glacier and rock before her, looking, yet seeing but little of that chilly grandeur, caring but little for its origin or its history, with sad eyes turned inward, vaguely contemplating a vague sorrow.

It was not a grief of yesterday's date—it was a sorrow made up of doubts and anxieties which had their beginning in Gerald Goring's letter telling her of his intended trip to Canada. From that hour to this she had perceived a gradual change in him. His letters from the Western world, kind and affectionate as they had been, were altogether different from the letters he had written to her in former years. When he came back the man himself seemed different. He was not less kind, or less attentive, less eager to gratify and to anticipate her wishes. To her, and in all his relations with her, he was faultless: but he was changed. Something had gone out of him—life, spirit, soul, the flame which makes the lamp glorious and beautiful; something was faded and dead in him; leaving the man himself a gentlemanly piece of mechanism, like one of those victims to anatomical experiment from whose living body the brain, or some particular portion of the brain, has been abstracted, and which mechanically performs and repeats the same actions with a hideous soulless monotony. 'Was it that he loved her less? Was it that he had ceased to love her?' she had asked herself, recoiling with shuddering heart-sickness from the thought; as if she had found herself suddenly on the verge of some horrible abyss, and seen inevitable ruin and death below. No, she told herself, judging his heart by her own. A love that had grown as theirs had grown, side by side with the gradual growth of mind and body, a love interwoven with every memory and every hope, was not of the kind to change unawares to indifference. She was perfectly free from the taint of vanity; but she knew that she was worthy of her lover's love. She, who had been her father's idol, the object of respect and consideration from all about her, was accustomed to the idea of being beloved. She had been told too often of her beauty not to know that she was handsomer than the majority of women. She knew that in mental power she was her lover's equal; by birth, by fortune, by every attribute and quality, she was fitted to be his wife, to rule over his household, and to be a purifying and elevating influence in his life. His mother had loved her as warmly as it was possible for that languid nature to love anything. Their

two lives were interwoven by the tenderest associations of the past as well as by the solemn engagement which bound them in the present. No, it was not possible for Madoline, seeing all things from the standpoint of her own calm and evenly-balanced mind, to imagine infidelity in a lover so long and so closely bound to her. Those sudden aberrations of the human mind which wreck so many lives, for which no looker-on can account, and which make men and women a world's wonder, had never come within the range of her experience.

Rejecting the idea of inconstancy, Madoline was compelled to find some other reason for the indefinable change which had slowly been revealed to her since Gerald's last home-coming. What could it be except the languor of ill-health, or, perhaps, the terrible satiety of a life which had so few duties, and so many indulgences, a life that called for no effort of mind, for not one act of self-denial?

'Every man ought to have a career,' she said to herself. 'My poor Gerald has none; no ambition; nothing to hope for, or work for, or build upon. The new days of his life bring him nothing but old pleasures. He is getting weary and worn out in the very morning of existence. What will he be when the day begins to wane?'

She had been thinking of these things for a long time, and had determined upon opening her mind to her lover, seriously, candidly, without reserve, with all the outspoken freedom of one who deemed herself a part of his life, his second self.

Here, in the face of these solemn heights, which seem ever typical of the loftier aims of life—all the more so, perhaps, because of that air of unattainableness which pervades them—she felt as if they were more alone, farther from all the sordid considerations of worldly wisdom than in the valley below. She could speak to him here from her heart of hearts.

He was walking by her side along one of the narrow paths, just where a rustic fence separated the grounds of the hotel from the steep mountain side—walking somewhat listlessly, lost in a dreamy silence—when she put her arm gently through his and drew a little nearer to him.

'Gerald dearest, I want to talk to you—seriously.'

He turned suddenly, and looked at her, with more of alarm in his countenance than she had anticipated.

'Don't be frightened,' she said with a sweet smile. 'I am not going to be severe. I am only anxious.'

'Anxious about what?'

'About you, dear love; about your health, mental and physical. You remember what you told me before you went to Canada.'

'Yes.'

'Your trip did you good, did it not?'

'Worlds of good. I came home a whole man.'

'But since you came home the old feeling of languor has returned, has it not? You take so little interest in life; you look at everything with such a weary indifferent air.'

'My dearest, do you expect me to go into raptures with the beaten tracks and cockney lions of Switzerland, as poor little Daphne does? There is not a yard of the ground we have been passing over that I do not know by heart—that I have not seen under every condition of atmosphere, and in every variety of circumstances. You forget how many months of my life I wasted in balancing myself upon razor-edged *arrêtes*, and hewing my way up perpendicular peaks with an ice-axe. I cannot gush about these dear old familiar mountains, or fall into an ecstasy because the lakes are bluer and broader than our Avon.'

'I don't expect you to be ecstatic, dear; I only want to know that you are happy, and that you take a healthy interest in life. I have been thinking lately that a man in your position ought to have a public career. Without public duties the life of a very rich man must inevitably be idle, since all his private duties are done by other people. And an idle life never yet was a happy one.'

'Spoken like a copy-book, my dearest,' answered Gerald lightly. 'Well, I own I have led an idle life hitherto, but some of it has been rather laborious idleness; as when I accomplished the passage of the Roththal Sattel and ascended yonder Jungfrau between sunrise and sundown; or when I came as near death as a man can come, and yet escape it, while climbing the Pointe des Lerins, in the French Alps.'

'I want you by-and-by to think of another kind of labour, Gerald,' said Lina, with tender seriousness. 'I want you to think of doing good to your fellow-men—you, who are so gifted, and who have the means of carrying out every benevolent intention. I want you to be useful in your generation, and to win for yourself one of those great enduring names which are only won by usefulness.'

'Come now, my sweetest monitor, there you shoot beyond the mark. Surely Virgil and Horace, Dante and Shakespeare, have won names of wider glory than all the useful men who ever lived. That idea of usefulness has never had much charm for me. I have not a practical mind. I take after my mother, who was one of the lilies of the field, rather than after my father, who belonged to the toilers and spinners. If I had discovered in my nature any vein of the gold of poetry, I would have been willing to dig hard for that immortal ore; but as I can't be a poet, I don't care to be anything else.'

'And with your talents and your wealth you can be content to be nothing?' exclaimed Lina, deeply shocked.

'Nothing, except a tolerably indulgent landlord, a patron of the fine arts, on a small scale, and by-and-by, if you please—your—obedient—husband.'

The last words came somewhat slowly.

'If you are happy, I am content,' said Lina, with a sigh; 'but it is because I fancy you are not happy that I urge you to lead a more active life, to give yourself greater variety of thought and occupation.'

'And do you think that, if I were unhappy, the wear and fret of public life, the dealing with workers whose chief object seems to be to frustrate and stultify each other's efforts; to be continually baulked and disappointed; to have my most generous impulses ridiculed, my loftiest hopes cried down as the dreams of a madman; perhaps, at the close of my career, after I had given my days and nights, my brain and body, to the public cause, to be denounced as an incendiary and a lunatic—do you think a career of that kind would ensure happiness? No, love, Providence, in its divine wisdom, has allowed me to belong to the lotus-eating class. Let me nibble my lotus, and lie at ease in my sunshiny valley, and be content to let others enjoy the rapture of the fray.'

'If I could be sure that you were happy,' faltered Lina, feeling very unhappy herself.

'Ought I not to be happy, when you are so good to me?' he asked, taking her hand and pressing it tenderly, with very real affection, but an affection chastened by remorse. 'I am as happy as a man can be who has inherited a natural bent to melancholy. My mother was not a cheerful woman, as you know.'

This was an undeniable fact. Lady Geraldine, after having made what some people called a splendid marriage, and others a *mésalliance*, had gone through life with an air of subdued melancholy, an elegant pensiveness which suited her languid beauty as well as the colours she chose for her gowns, or the flowers she wore in her hair. She had borne herself with infinite grace, as one whose cup of life was tinctured with sorrow, beneath the snowy calm of whose bosom the slow consuming fire of grief was working its gradual ravages. She died of an altogether common-place disease, but she contrived so to bear herself in her decay, that when she was dead everybody was convinced she had perished slowly of a broken heart, and that she had never smiled after her marriage with Mr. Giles-Goring. This was society's verdict upon a woman who had lived an utterly selfish and self-indulgent life, and who had spent fifteen hundred a-year upon her milliner.

Lina and Gerald strolled up and down for a little while, almost in silence. She had said her say, and nothing had come of it. Her disappointment was bitter; for she had fancied that

it needed but a few words from her to kindle the smouldering fires of ambition. She had supposed that every man was ambitious, however he might allow his aspirations to be choked by the thorns of this world: and here she had found in the lover of her choice a man without the faintest desire to achieve greatness, or to do good in his generation. Had he been such a man as Edgar Turchill, she would have felt no surprise at his indifference to the wider questions of life. Edgar was a man born to do his duty in a narrow groove; a large-hearted, simple-minded creature, but little removed from the peasant who tills the fields, and whose desires and hopes are shut in by the narrow circle of village life. But Gerald Goring—Gerald, whose ardent boyhood, whose passion for all the loftier delights of life, had lifted him so high above the common ruck of mankind—to find him at nine-and-twenty a languid pessimist, willing to live a life as selfish and as useless as his mother had led before him: this was indeed hard. And it was harder still for Madoline to discover how much she had overrated her influence upon him. A few years ago a word from her had been sufficient to urge him to any effort, to give bent and purpose to his mind; but a few years ago he had been still warm with the flush and fire of early youth.

Daphne and Edgar joined them presently, both warm and breathless after a small experiment in the climbing way.

'We have seen everything, and we have been up a mountain,' exclaimed Daphne. 'It is the funniest little village—a handful of wooden cottages perched on a narrow track straggling along anyhow on the very edge of the hill; a little new church that looks as if it had dropped from the clouds; a morsel of a post-office; a stack of wood beside every house; and a bundle of green vegetables hanging to dry in every porch and balcony. Poor people, do they live upon dried vegetables, I wonder? We found an English lady and her son sitting in the middle of the road—if you can call it a road—sketching a native boy. He was a very handsome boy, and sat as still as a statue. We stood ever so long and watched the two artists; and then we had a climb; and Edgar says I am a good climber. Do you think,' coaxingly to Lina, 'we might try the Silberhorn after luncheon?'

They lunched in a sunny airy corner of the big bare *salle-à-manger* merrily enough, or with that seeming gaiety of heart which brightens so many a board, notwithstanding that the stream flows darkly enough below the ripple and the gleam. Daphne had made it the business of her life to seem happy and at ease ever since that fatal night at Fribourg. She wanted Gerald Goring to believe that she was satisfied with her lot—nay, even that she was honestly attached to her plighted husband, and that her conduct that night had been but a truant

impulse, a momentary aberration from common sense and duty. She was fighting her battle bravely, sometimes smiling with an aching heart, sometimes really succeeding in being happy, with the inconsiderate unreasoning happiness of youth and health, and the rapture of living in a world where all was alike new and beautiful. After luncheon she went out with Edgar for another ramble, until it should be time to begin the descent to Lauterbrunnen. They had all agreed to walk down, in a leisurely way, after tea; and the horses had already gone back with the two men who had led them up. Daphne wanted to learn where and how she could get nearest to the mountains. It seemed provoking to see them there, so near, and yet as far beyond her reach as if she had been looking at them from her window at Interlaken.

'Would it really be too much for an afternoon walk?' she asked, gazing longingly at the Silberhorn.

Gerald explained the preparations and the assistance, and the length of time which would be required for any attempt upon that snowy crest.

'Please show me the very ledge where the child's red frock used to be seen,' she asked, perusing the wilderness of crag and peak.

'What child? what frock?' asked Edgar.

'Don't you know that ever so many years ago a lammergeier carried off a child from this village of Mürren, and alighted with it upon an inaccessible shelf of rock on the side of the Jungfrau, and that for years afterwards some red scraps, the remnants of the poor baby's clothes, were seen amongst the snow?'

'A pitiful story, wherever you found it,' said Gerald; 'but I think the baby's frock would have been blown away or buried under the snow before the vulture had forgotten the flavour of the baby.'

And then, seeing that Daphne hungered for any information about yonder mountain, he condescended to tell her how he and a couple of friends, allied by the climbing propensity rather than by ancient friendship, had ascended the north face of the Silberhorn, with the idea of finding a direct route over its summit to the top of the Jungfrau; how after ten hours of very hard work they had planted their feet on the top of the dazzling peak, only to find the snow falling thickly round them, and the Jungfrau and the Giessen glacier already hidden behind a fleecy cloud; how, after waiting in vain for the storm to pass, they had made a perilous descent to the upper plateau of the Giessen glacier; and how there, amidst thick clouds and driving snow, they groped their way round the edges of huge crevasses before they hit on a practical path descending the ice-fall; and how, finding the night closing in upon them, they

were fain to sit upon a ledge of rock under a sheltering cliff till daybreak.

'Poor things!' exclaimed Daphne with infinite compassion; 'and you never reached the top of the Jungfrau after all.'

'Not by that way. I have scaled her granite point from the Roththal Sattel.'

'And is it very lovely up there?'

'*C'est selon.* When I mounted, the Maiden was wrapped in cloud, and there was no distant view, nor could we spare more than a quarter of an hour for rest on the summit; but we saw an avalanche or two on our way, and altogether we had a very good time.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

'I MEANE WELL, BY GOD THAT SIT ABOVE.'

It was pleasant to drink tea at a little table in the garden of the inn, with the white mountain world spread before them in all its glory, flushed with the golden lights of afternoon. Edgar looked ineffably happy as he sat sipping his tea and watching Daphne eat bread and honey, which seemed her chief nutriment in this part of the world: for Swiss poultry and Swiss veal, for all the varieties of *col-au-vent*, *fricandeau*, *ris de veau*, and *fricassée*, under which the inevitable calf disguised himself, she showed herself absolutely indifferent; but she had an infinite capacity for Swiss rolls and Swiss honey.

While they were sitting at tea, resting before they began the downward walk, Mr. Turchill produced a letter which that morning's post had brought him from his mother: one of those worthy common-place letters which set one's teeth on edge when read aloud amidst the loftiest aspects of nature. But Edgar saw nothing beyond the love and the kindness in his mother's epistle, and would have read it on the summit of Caucasus, yea, on that topmost untrodden snow-peak which the Persians call the Holy Mountain, and would have perceived no discord between the letter and the scene.

'The dear mother's letter is full of you, Daphne,' he said; 'would it bore you and Mr. Goring if I were to read a little of it, Lina?'

Mr. Goring protested, with a stifled yawn, that he would be delighted. 'There is nothing,' he asserted, 'more interesting than domestic correspondence. Look at the Paston letters, for instance. And I could fancy your mother writing quite in the Paston style,' he added graciously.

Edgar unfolded the thin, closely written sheet, written in those neat, sloping characters which had been drilled into all

the young ladies at Miss Tompion's academy, and crossed—for the habit of crossing a letter had obtained in Mrs. Turchill's youth, and she returned to it instinctively under stress of foreign postage, albeit twopence halfpenny is not a ruinous amount to pay for a letter.

'"I am pleased to hear that Daphne is enjoying herself, and that she is so enthusiastic about the scenery. I remember, when I learned drawing at Miss Tompion's, doing a very pretty sketch of Chamouni, with Mont Blanc in the background, in black and white chalks on tinted paper. I believe some of the snow was scratched in with a penknife by Signor Pasticcio, but all the rest was my very own, and papa gave me a sovereign when the drawing was sent home. It used to hang in your father's dressing-room, but one of the housemaids contrived to break the glass one day with her broom-handle, and I did not care to go to the expense of having it reglazed: Gilbert is so dear for all jobs of that kind. I have always understood that the Jungfrau is very inferior to Mont Blanc; but as you say Byron admired it I have no doubt it is very beautiful, though, of course, in a minor degree. Every geography will tell you that Mont Blanc is the higher. I hope you are careful to avoid wet feet"—hum—hum—hum,' mumbled Edgar, skipping the tender mother's injunctions about his care of his health, and hurrying on to that part of the letter which related to Daphne. 'Oh, here it is. "Tell Daphne, with my love, that I am going carefully over all the house-linen—weeding out all the sheets that are weak in the middle"—dear old mother! she always will go into details—"and making a large addition to the table-linen. I have also had a new inventory made in duplicate. I know that the modern idea is for the bride to provide the house-linen. That is all very well when the husband is a young man who has his own way to make in the world, but not for my boy, who has a home of his own—a fine old house which his ancestors have lived in, and spent their money upon, from generation to generation. I hope Daphne will be as fond of the old Hawksyard glass and china—which, as she knows, is the collection of more than a century—as she is of the mountains; but I'm afraid the romantic kind of temperament which goes into raptures with mountains is hardly the disposition which could take delight in housekeeping, and the many details of home-life."'

'I hope you won't be angry with her for saying that,' added Edgar apologetically, as he hastily folded the letter, feeling that he had read too much. 'You know she means it kindly.'

'I know she has been ever so much more indulgent than I deserve,' answered Daphne gaily; 'I mean to be a most dutiful daughter-in-law, and to learn everything your mother will deign

to teach me in the way of housekeeping, from hemming tea-cloths to making mincemeat. One ought to make one's own mincemeat, ought one not, Edgar? Do you and I belong to the class who make their own mincemeat?'

'I think it's rather a question of inclination than of rank, love. But I'd rather you left the pies and puddings to the cook. I'd rather have you riding across the Vale of the Red Horse with me than stoning raisins or chopping suet in the still-room.'

'And I would rather, too.'

'Do you know that there is a great deal of quiet sagacity in your mother's gentle depreciation of Daphne's passion for mountain scenery?' said Gerald, his face lighting up with something of the old mischievous spirit, something of that gaiety of heart with which he had teased Daphne in the days when she was Poppæa and he was Nero! 'This frantic admiration of snow-peaks is only a modern feeling, a mere fashion and fad of the moment, like the worship of Chippendale furniture and Adam chimney-pieces. The old Greeks knew nothing of it. The ancients never raved about their mountains. They valued them only because their tops touched the blue ether, the world peopled by the gods. Even your Shakespeare, the man of universal mind, had no passion for mountain lands.'

'Because he had never seen anything higher than the Wrekin, poor darling!' said Daphne, with delicious compassion; as if she were speaking of a London Arab who had never seen a buttercup.

'Ruskin thinks it was good for his genius to have seen so little. "No mountain passions were to be allowed to Shakespeare," he says; "Shakespeare could be allowed no mountains—not even any supreme natural beauty. He had to be left with his kingcups and clover, pansies, the passing clouds, the Avon's flow, and the undulating hills and woods of Warwickshire, lest it should make him in the least overrate their power on the strong, full-fledged minds of men."'

'That is remakably clever,' said Daphne; 'but there is a tone of calm superiority about it which makes my blood boil. Why will all the critics insist upon patronising Shakespeare, as if they knew so much more about him than ever he knew about himself? Talk of vivisection indeed, vivisection is not half so atrocious as the way Shakespeare has been treated by modern criticism!'

And now, when all the valley below them lay steeped in golden light, when the northward-facing mountains were beginning to take the chill cold gray of evening, and the western pinnacles were flushed with rose and purple, they began their descent of the narrow winding way, gaily, to all seeming, for they talked a good deal, and Daphne lingered on her way to

gather the wild flowers that grew on the thymy banks—harebells, and clover, gentian, and the Alpine rose, a white starry flower with a long fragile stem, and delicate ferns, and here and there a handful of wild strawberries. Gerald had more than once to insist upon her hastening her footsteps, lest night should overtake them on the steep mountain path.

'If you loiter so much I will put you into a wooden sledge when we get to the halfway house, and run you down the mountain,' he threatened.

Lovelier and yet more lovely looked the pine-woods, the green slopes, the fertile valley, the far-away white peaks, so shadowy, so awful in the changing lights of evening. Half the sky was ablaze with crimson and orange, fading off into tender opalescent greens and purples, the indescribable hues of rare jasper and rarer jade, as they neared the Staubach. They had loitered as long as it was safe to loiter. The lamps were lighted at the inn, and their coachman was watching for their return. They drove home through the gray twilight, which was fast deepening into night, and through a landscape of deepest gloom—a narrow region, walled in by dark hills; dim lights, dotted here and there amidst the darkness, ever so far apart, telling of lonely lives, of humble peasant homes where pleasure and variety were unknown, a life of monotonous labour, hidden from the world.

'Have you enjoyed your day, Daphne?' asked Lina, as they drove home, the rapid river flowing noisily beside them, the white foam on the waters flashing through the gloom.

'Enjoyed it? There is no word big enough to say how delightful it has been! It is a day that will stand apart in the history of my life,' answered Daphne, slipping her hand lovingly through her sister's arm.

'What a privileged nature to be so easily made happy!' said Gerald, with a palpable sneer.

People are apt to let slip society's mask in such a moment, on a dark road shut in by mountain and wood, after a long and thoughtful silence, forgetting that feeling is audible in the darkness, though faces are hidden, and the clouded brow or the quiver of the lip is invisible.

Gerald Goring had been thinking deeply during the hillside walk and the homeward drive, touched inexpressibly by Madoline's affection, and trying as honestly as was possible to a character which was not given to mental or moral effort—trying to face a future clouded over with fears. Could he ever be again as he had been, Madoline's true lover? This was the question which he asked himself, coming down the hill in the glory of the evening light, a little aloof from the other three. His honour and reverence for her were in nowise lessened by that fatal passion which had changed the current of his life.

He knew that of all women he had ever met she was the noblest and the best; that, with her, life would be lifted above the sordid, vulgar level of selfish pleasures and sensual indulgences; that, as her husband, he could not fail to become in somewise useful to his species, to win some measure of renown, and to leave a name behind him that would sound sweet in the ears of generations to come. He could imagine her in the riper beauty of matronhood, the mother of his children, training up his sons to tread the loftier paths of life, rearing his daughters in an atmosphere of purity and love. He pictured her at the head of his household; he told himself that with such a wife he must be an idiot if he missed happiness. And then he looked with gloomy despairing eyes at the other side of the question, and tried to realise what his life would be with the butterfly being who had crept into his heart and made herself its empress.

As well as he knew Lina's perfection did he know Daphne's faultiness. She was frivolous, selfish, shallow, capricious, vehement. Yes, but he loved her. She had no higher idea of this world than as a place made exquisitely beautiful in order that she might be happy in it; nor of her fellow-creatures than as persons provided to minister to her pleasures; nor of the future beyond life than as a vague misty something which had better not be thought about; nor of duty, but as a word found in the Church Catechism, and which one might banish from one's mind after one's confirmation. Yes, but he loved her. Her faultiness did not lessen his love by the weight of a grain of thistledown. He yearned to take her to his heart, faulty as she was, and cherish her there for ever. He longed to spend the rest of his days with her, and it seemed to him that life would be worthless without her. She might prove a silly wife, a careless mother. Yes, but he loved her. For him she was just the one most exquisite thing in creation, the one supreme necessity of his soul.

'"*Animæ dimidium meæ*." Yes, that is what she is,' he said to himself as he sat in the summer darkness, with dreamy eyes looking upward to the lonely melancholy hills, where huge arollas of a thousand years' growth spread their black branches against the snow-line just above them. What a desolate world it looked in the gathering gloom!—only a few solitary stars gleaming in the infinite remoteness of the sky, the moon not yet risen above yonder snowy battlements.

It was past nine o'clock when they drove into the shrubberied approach to the Jungfraublick. The hotel looked dazzling after the obscurity of the valley. Daphne would have liked to dash into the billiard-room and challenge her lover to a game; but, since it was impossible for a young lady to play at a public table, she went upstairs to the sitting room on the first floor, where Sir Vernon was waiting for them, and

where there was a table spread with tea, cold chickens, and rolls and honey. Lina sat by her father, telling him the history of their day, and hearing all he had to say about his letters and papers. Edgar was in tremendous spirits, and inclined to make fun of the queer little village on the edge of everlasting snows; Daphne was talkative; Sir Vernon was gracious. It was only Gerald Goring who bore no part in the conversation. He looked worn and wearied with the day's work, and yet it had been nothing for an Alpine climber; a mere constitutional walk, barely enough to keep a man in training. When tea was over he retired to the balcony, and sat there, smoking cigarettes and watching the moon climb the dark slopes of heaven; while the others looked over newly-arrived papers and periodicals, and discussed to-morrow's trip to Grindelwald and the glaciers.

The morning came, as fair and fresh a dawn as ever peeped shyly across the edge of the Alps, but Gerald, watching the slow kindling of that rosy glow after a sleepless night, greeted the new day with no thanksgiving. To him, in his present frame of mind, it would have seemed a good thing if that day had never dawned; if this planet Earth had dropped out of its place in the starry procession, and gone down to darkness and chaos, like a torch burnt out. He rose with that inexorable sun, which pursues his course with so little regard for the griefs and perplexities of humanity, and was out in the dewy woods above the hotel before civilised people were stirring. Anything was better than to lie on a sleepless couch staring at the light. Here, moving about among the dark pine-stems, treading the narrow tracks, shifting his point of view at every turn in the path, life was less intolerable. He could think better—his brain was clearer—his pulse less feverish.

'What was he to do?' he asked himself helplessly. What did Wisdom counsel? What did Honour urge? Surely about this latter voice there could be no question. Honour would have him be true to Madoline, at any sacrifice of his own feelings. Duty was plain enough here. He had pledged himself to her by every bond which honest men hold sacred. He must keep his word.

'But if we are both miserable for life?' he asked himself. 'Can she be happy if I am wretched? And what charm has existence for me without Daphne?'

'You must forget Daphne,' urged Duty; 'your first and nobler love must obtain the mastery. You must pluck this idle weed, this mere caprice, out of your heart.'

He told himself that the thing was to be done and he would try honestly to do it. He would steel himself against Daphne's wiles. Did not Ulysses pluck himself away from the enchantress's fatal island, wrench himself out of her very web, and get

home to Ithaca sound in body and mind, and live happy ever afterwards with his faithful Penelope? Or at least this is the popular idea of Ulysses, in spite of those breathings of slander which make the Circe episode something more than Platonic. What nobler image can life give than that of a faithful lover, a loyal husband, tempted and yet true? Nor did poor little Daphne go out of her way to exercise Circean arts. She charmed as the flowers charm, innocently and unconsciously. She was no Becky Sharp, weaving a subtle web out of people's looks and smiles, drooping lashes, lifted eyelids, the arrowy gleams of fatal green eyes. She wanted to be faithful to her lover, and loyal to her sister. Her letter had been straight and true. If he sinned, he sinned of his own accord, and had no such excuses as Adam used against the partner God had given him.

He wandered about restlessly, in an utterly purposeless way, till it was time to go back to the seven o'clock breakfast. He would have liked to start alone for the shining slate mountain yonder, to spend the day there in a sultry solitude, lying on his back and staring up at the unfathomable blue, smoking a little, reading Heine a little—Heine's ballad-book had been his gospel of late—idling away the empty day, and growing wiser and better in solitude. But he was pledged to go in beaten tracks; to go and eat and drink at The Bear, and gaze at the lower glacier, like a Cook's tourist, and be faintly interested in the coachman's exposition of the view, and be blandly tolerant of girls selling edelweiss, and boys waking the echoes with Alpine horns, and all the conventional features of that exquisite drive from Interlaken to Grindelwald.

However much he might affect to despise the familiar route, he could not deny the beauty of the landscape by-and-by, when they were all seated in the carriage and had crossed the Lutschine for the first time, and were climbing slowly up the raised road above the river. It was a brilliant morning, the wooded hills steeped in sunlight and balmy summer air; the tender green of the young shoots showing bright against the sombre darkness of the everlasting pines; water rushing down the hillsides every here and there, sometimes a torrent, sometimes a fine thread like spun glass, dropping from crag to crag. The two young men got out of the carriage and walked up the hills; the valley through which the road wound was exquisitely verdant—a scene of pastoral beauty, fertile, richly wooded, but passing lonely. Daphne sorely missed the dappled kine which relieve and animate a Warwickshire landscape.

'What in Heaven's name has become of the cattle?' she exclaimed. 'Here are meadows, and homesteads, and gardens, and orchards, but not a living object in the landscape. I thought Switzerland swarmed with cows, and was musical with cow-

bells. And where is the chorus of herdsmen singing the "*Ranz des Vaches?*"'

'Perhaps there has been an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, and the cows have all been condemned,' speculated Edgar.

Gerald explained that the cattle and their keepers had all gone up into the higher regions to crop the summer herbage.

'And that accounts for this green and silent valley,' said Daphne. 'It is rather a romantic idea; but I should have liked to see the cattle all the same. I adore cows. I think a Jersey cow, with her stag-like head and eyes, is almost the loveliest thing in creation.'

'You shall have a herd of them at Hawksyard,' exclaimed Edgar eagerly; 'and I will build you a Swiss cowhouse at the end of the walnut walk.'

'Thank you so much,' said Daphne, with a faint smile, 'but I was thinking of them only in the abstract.'

There were times when any allusion to Hawksyard and the future irritated her like the sting of a summer insect.

Children appeared at every turn of the circuitous road. Here a sickly, large-eyed girl offered a handful of dingy edelweiss; there an unkempt ill-fed boy ran beside the horses, flapping off the flies with a leafy branch of ash or walnut; anon appeared the mountain musician playing his plaintive strain upon the native horn, and waking melancholiest echoes amid the solemn hills. The road crossed the river several times, over covered bridges, wooden arcades, which made a picturesque bit in the landscape, a pleasant lounging place too, on such a summer morning. But there seemed to be nobody about save the fly-flapping boys, and women and children offering new milk or the everlasting edelweiss.

It was the first time Daphne had seen the little velvety white flower, and she was keenly interested in it.

'Poor little colourless ice-blossom, so pale and dull-looking, like a life without joy or variety!' she said. 'They say that it grows under the snow. How nice it would be to go and hunt for it oneself! Please give the children plenty of money, Edgar.' And Mr. Turchill, whose pockets were always full of loose Helvetian coins—leaden sous and dingy-looking half-francs—scattered his largesse among the natives with a liberality rare in modern excursionists.

Half-way up the hill they came to a rustic restaurant, where the horses stopped to blow, and where the coachman invited the ladies to go and see a tame chamois in a little shed at the back of the house.

'He will be the first of his race I have seen,' said Daphne, 'though in Manfred's time this part of the country seems to have been overrun by them.'

They went through the restaurant kitchen to the shed behind it, to see the four-footed mountaineer. He was a melancholy little animal, altogether a shabby specimen of the chamois tribe, and looked sadly forlorn in his narrow den. One of his horns had been broken off, perhaps in the struggles that attended his capture.

'It is a painful sight,' said Daphne, turning away with a sigh.

She would have given all her pocket-money to set the chamois free; but he was one of the attractions of the house, and could not have been easily ransomed.

And now again across the Black Lutschine, by another covered bridge, and up the steep winding road through a narrow gorge in the hills, until the cleft widens, and the Grindenwald valley opens before them in all its glory, ringed round with mountains, the Great Eiger standing boldly out in front of them, with broad patches of snow on his dark stony front, behind a bold edge of pine-clad hill. There is unspeakable grandeur in that bleak and rugged mountain rising above the verdure and beauty of the nearer hills.

Daphne clasped her hands in unalloyed delight.

'It would be worth while coming to Switzerland if it were only for this,' she exclaimed; 'yet I am tortured by the idea of all the mountain-passes, glaciers, and waterfalls that we are not going to see. I have a great mind to throw away my Baedeker. He makes me positively miserable with suggestions that I can't carry out.'

'You will be able to see all you care about next year,' said Edgar, 'when you and I are free to go where we like. I believe it will be always where *you* like.'

'Next year seems half a century off,' she answered carelessly.

Their journey was nearly done. The carriage went down into the valley, then climbed another hill, and they had passed the outskirts of the village of Grindelwald, and were drawing up in the garden in front of the Bear Hotel. Very full of life and bustle was the inn garden on this bright summer morning. Tourists without number standing about, or sitting under the verandah, Americans, Germans, English, French, all full of life and enjoyment: some starting with their alpenstocks, intent on pedestrian excursions; ladies and sedentary middle-aged gentlemen being hoisted on to mules; carriages driving in; horses being fed and cleaned; a Babel of languages, a perpetual moving in and out.

Mr. Goring ordered a slight refection of wine and coffee, rolls and honey, to be brought to a pleasant spot under the verandah, at a point where the view across the deep valley to the hills beyond was widest and grandest. Here they rested themselves

a little before starting on foot for the lower glacier. Both Madeline and Daphne were in favour of walking.

'I went on a mule when I was here with my father,' said Lina, 'and I remember thinking how much I should have preferred being free to choose my own path.'

It was a lovely walk, so soon as they were clear of the hotels and boarding-houses, and the scattered wooden *châlets* of the village, just such a ramble as Daphne loved; a narrow footpath winding up and down a verdant hillside—here a garden, and there an orchard—funny little cottages and cottage-gardens perched anyhow on slopes and angles of the road; a rustic bridge across the rocky bed of a river; and there in front of them the glacier—a mass of corrugated ice lying on a steep slope between two mountains—shining, beautiful, like a pale sapphire. They loitered as much as they pleased by the wayside, Daphne straying here and there as her fancy led her—a restless, birdlike creature, almost seeming to have wings, so lightly did she flutter from hillock to crag, so airy was the step with which she skimmed along the narrow rocky pathway, beaten by the feet of so many travellers. They spent a good deal of time in the immediate neighbourhood of the glacier, 'doing it thoroughly,' as Edgar remarked afterwards, with a satisfied air; and then they went quietly back to The Bear, and dined in a corner of the big, barren dining-room, and drove back to Interlaken in the summer dusk, Gerald almost as silent as he had been the night before during the much shorter drive from Lauterbrunnen.

'I'm afraid it bores you to go over the ground you know so well,' said Madoline, grieved at her lover's silence, which looked like depression, or mental weariness.

'No; the country is too lovely, one could hardly tire of it,' he answered; 'but don't you think it intensely melancholy? There is something in the silence and darkness of these hills which fills my soul with gloom. Even the lights scattered about here and there are so remote and so few that they only serve to intensify the solitude. So long as sunlight and shadow give life and motion to the scene it is gay enough; but with nightfall one finds out all at once how desolate it is.'

There was more excursionising next day, and again on the next; then came Sunday morning and church, and then a walk through the pine-woods to see some athletic sports that were held in a green basin which made a splendid amphitheatre, round whose grassy sides the audience sat picturesquely grouped on the velvet sward. On this day the young women came out in all the glory of their canton costume—snowy habit-shirts and black velvet bodices, silver chains pendent from their shoulders, silver daggers or arrows thrust through their plaited hair, long silk aprons of brightest colours—a costume which gave new gaiety

to the landscape. Then in the evening there was a concert at the little conversation-house in the walnut avenue, a concert so crowded by native and foreigner that there was never an empty seat in the verandah, and the waiters were at their wits' ends to keep everyone supplied with tea and coffee, lemonade and wine. After the concert there were fireworks, coloured lights to glorify the fountains—almost the gayest, brightest scene that Daphne's eyes had ever looked upon. Then, when Bengal lights and rockets had faded and vanished into the summer night, they walked quietly back to the hotel under a starry sky.

'I believe Daphne likes Bengal lights better than stars,' said Gerald mockingly, as he gave Madoline his arm, and went on with her in advance of the others, across a field that lay on the other side of the walnut walk.

'You may believe anything you like of Daphne's bad taste and general idiocy,' the girl retorted: and Lina was distressed at thinking how disagreeable these two, whom she would have had so affectionately attached, always were to each other.

And all the while Gerald Goring was wondering what he was to do with his life—whether it were possible to break the chain which bound him, that golden chain which had once been his chief glory—whether it were possible to reconcile honour and love.

They left Interlaken next morning, and went straight through to the little station at Montreux. Daphne, who had pored over her Baedeker till she fancied that she knew every inch of Switzerland, was deeply grieved at not being able to go on to Lucerne and the Rigi, Flüelen, and all the Tell district; but Sir Vernon would go no farther than Interlaken. He considered that he had made a sufficient sacrifice of his own comfort already for his younger daughter's pleasure.

'I hate moving about, and I detest hotels,' he said; 'I am yearning for the quiet of my own house.'

After this no more could be said. Daphne gave herself up to silent contemplation of the Jungfrau range throughout the journey, by boat and rail, hardly taking her eyes from those snowy peaks till they melted from her view, fading ghostlike in the blue ether.

'They seem to be a part of my life,' she said, as she turned from the carriage window with a regretful sigh; 'I cannot bear to think that I have seen the last of them.'

'Only for this year,' answered Edgar cheerily, not caring much for mountains in the abstract, but ready to admire anything that Daphne loved. 'It is such an easy matter to come to Switzerland nowadays. The Jungfrau is as accessible as Brighton Pier.'

CHAPTER XXX.

'THER WAS NO WIGHT, TO WHOM SHE DURSTE PLAIN.'

THEY had been at Montreux more than a week, and it seemed to Daphne as if she had lived half her life on the shore of the beautiful lake, with the snowy summit of the Dent du Midi rising yonder in its inaccessible grandeur, above the fertile hills of the foreground, those precipitous green slopes, where *châlets* and farms were dotted about picturesquely in positions that would have seemed perilous for birds' nests.

The villa was charming; a white-walled *château* all plate-glass windows, verandahs, balconies, brightened from roof to basement by crimson and white Spanish blinds. The rooms were prettily furnished in a foreign style—commodes, cabinets, clocks, candelabra, and Louis Quatorze chairs of a painfully upright architecture. To these Sir Vernon had added several easy chairs and couches of the *pouf* species, hired from an upholsterer at Geneva. Photographs in velvet or ivory frames, books, work-baskets, easels, and five-o'clock tea-tables, brought from South Hill, gave a home-like air to the rooms; and a profusion of the loveliest flowers, exquisitely arranged, told of Madoline's presence.

There was a delicious garden sloping down to the lake, whose gently-curving shore made here a lovely bay; a garden in which roses grew as they only grow in the neighbourhood of water. There were summer-houses of the airiest construction; trellised walks, rose-shaded; a parterre of carefully-chosen flowers, with a fountain in the centre; and the blue bright water at the edge of the lawn.

Here Daphne had established her boat, a light skiff with a felucca sail and a striped awning, to be used at pleasure; a boat which, seen flitting across the lake in the sunshine, looked like a swallow. There was a capital boat-house at a corner of the lawn, wooden and delightfully Swiss, with balconies fronting the lake, and an upper room in which one could take one's pleasure, sketching, writing, reading, tea-drinking. The weather had been peerless since their arrival at Montreux; and Madoline and Daphne spent the greater part of their lives out-of-doors. They were always together, Daphne rarely leaving the shelter of her sister's wing. She had become amazingly industrious, and had begun a tremendous piece of work in crewels, neither more nor less than a set of curtain-borderings for the drawing-room at Hawksyard. Vainly had Madoline entreated her to begin with an antimacassar or a fender-stool, some undertaking which would demand but a reasonable exercise of patience and perseverance. Daphne would hear of no work that was not gigantic.

'Do you think Cheops would ever have been famous if he had begun to make pyramids on a small scale?' she asked. 'He would have exhausted his interest in the idea, frittered away his enthusiasm upon trifles. How much wiser it was in him to make a dash at something big while his fancy was at a white heat! If I don't embroider a set of curtains I'll do nothing.'

'Well, dearest, you must follow your own fancy,' answered Lina gently; 'but I'm afraid your life will be a history of great beginnings.'

Daphne began with extraordinary industry upon a bold pattern of sunflowers and acanthus leaves, huge sunflowers, huge foliage, on a Pompeian-red ground. Whenever she was not in her boat, skimming about the lake, she was toiling at a leaf or a sunflower, sitting on a cushion at Lina's feet, the sunny head bent over her work, the slim white fingers moving busily, the dark brows knitted, in the intensity of her occupation. She was always intent upon finishing a leaf, or a stalk, or a petal, or on realising the grand effect of a completed flower. She would sit till the last available moment before dinner, rushing off to dress in a frantic hurry, and reappearing just as the subdued announcement of dinner was being breathed into Sir Vernon's ear. Edgar was filled with delight to see her so occupied. It seemed to him a pledge of future domesticity.

'It is so sweet to see you working for our home,' he said one afternoon, seated on the grass at her feet, and placidly watching every stitch.

'Eh?' she said, looking up in half-surprise, being much more interested in the sunflowers for their own sakes than in their future relation to the old Warwickshire Grange. 'Oh yes, to be sure. I hope I shall finish the curtains; but it is a dreadful long way to look forward. There will be three hundred and fifty-five sunflowers. I have done one and a half That leaves just three hundred and fifty-three and a half to do. I rather wish it were the other way.'

'Beginning to flag already?' said Lina, who was sketching a little bit of the mountain landscape on the other side of the lake, a bold effect of sun and shadow.

'Not the least in the world,' cried Daphne; 'only I do so long to see the effect of the curtains when they are finished. It will be stupendous. But do you know, Edgar, I am afraid your mother will detest them. One requires to be educated up to sunflowers; and Mrs. Turchill belongs to that degraded period of art in which people could see beauty in roses and lilies.'

'One can hardly look back upon those dark ages without a shudder,' said Gerald Goring, stretched on a rustic bench close at hand, looking up at the blue sky, an image of purposeless idleness. 'Thank Providence we have emerged from the age

of curves into the age of angles—from the Hogarthian to the Burne-Jonesian ideal of beauty.'

'There was a period in my own life when I had not awakened to the loveliness of the sunflower,' said Daphne gravely. 'I know the first time I was introduced to one in crewel-work I thought it hideous; but since I have known Tadema's pictures I am another creature. Yet I doubt if, even in my regenerate state, a garden all sunflowers would be quite satisfactory.'

'You would require the Roman atmosphere, classic busts and columns, Tyrian-dyed draperies, and everybody dressed in the straight-down Roman fashion,' replied Gerald languidly. 'No doubt Poppæa was fond of sunflowers; and I daresay they grew in that royal garden where Messalina held such high jinks that time her imperial husband came home unexpectedly and somewhat disturbed the harmony of the evening.'

It was altogether an idle kind of life which they were leading just now at Montreux. During the first week Edgar and Daphne had excursionised a little upon the nearest hillsides in the early morning before breakfast; but lovely as were the chestnut-woods and the limpid streamlets gushing out of their rocky beds and dripping into stone troughs fringed with delicate ferns, exquisite as was the morning air, and the fairy picture of the lake below them, developing some new charm with every hundred yards of the ascent, Daphne soon wearied of these morning rambles, and seemed glad to forego them.

'The weather is getting horribly oppressive,' she said, 'or perhaps I am not quite so strong as I used to be. I would rather sit in the garden and amuse myself more lazily.'

'You must not pretend to be an invalid,' said Edgar cheerily; 'come now, Daphne: why, there are not many girls can handle a pair of sculls as you do.'

'I didn't say I was an invalid. In my boat I feel in my element, but listlessly creeping about these hills wearies me to death.'

'You are very different from me,' answered Edgar reproachfully. 'Your company is always enough for my happiness.'

'Then you shall have as much of my company as you please in the garden or on the lake. But pray let us be idle while we can. When Aunt Rhoda arrives we shall be goaded to all kinds of excursionising, dragged up every hill in the district.'

'I thought you wanted to climb mountains?'

'Yes, mountains; Mont Blanc, or the Matterhorn, or Monte Rosa—anything respectable. But to exhaust one's energy in scaling green banks! Why, in Wales they would call the Col du Jaman a bank. However, when Aunt Rhoda arrive I shall be equal to the effort. Of course we shall have to do Chillon.'

'I thought you were so interested in Chillon.'

'Yes, as an image in my mind. I love to gaze at its dark towers from the distance, to send my fancies back to the Middle Ages, penetrate the gloomy prison and keep the captives company—but to go over the cells formally, in the midst of a little herd of tourists, staring over each other's shoulders, and treading upon each other's toes—to be shown by a snuffy old custodian the ring to which Bonnivard was chained, the grating out of which he could see the "little isle that in his very face did smile"—that is a kind of thing which I absolutely abhor.'

Mrs. Ferrers had written to her brother, informing him that as she had been all her life longing for a glimpse of Swiss scenery, and that as so favourable an opportunity had now presented itself for the gratification of that desire, she had made up her mind to come straight to Montreux by herself.

'It is a tremendous undertaking for one who has travelled so little,' she wrote; 'for you know, dear Vernon, how my devotion to Lina and your interests kept me a prisoner at South Hill during those years in which I should naturally have been seeing all that is worth seeing in this beautiful world. It is an awful idea to travel all the way from Warwickshire to Lake Leman, with only a maid, but I feel that this is a golden opportunity which must not be lost. To be in Switzerland with you and dearest Lina will be a delight, the memory of which will endure all my life. It is quite hopeless to suppose that dear Marmaduke can ever travel with me beyond Cheltenham, or Bath, or Torquay. His health and his settled habits both forbid the thought. Why, then, should I not take advantage of your being in Switzerland to realise a long-cherished wish? I shall be no trouble to you: I do not ask you even to receive me under your roof, unless indeed you happen to have a spare room or two at your disposal. You can make arrangements for me and my maid to live *en pension* at one of those excellent hotels which I am told abound on the banks of the lake, and I can spend all my days with you without feeling myself either a burden or an expense.'

'What are we to do, Lina?' asked Sir Vernon, when his elder daughter had read the letter; 'your aunt will be a terrible bore in any case, but I suppose she will be a little less of a nuisance if we put her out of the house.'

'There are three spare rooms,' said Lina. 'It would be rather inhospitable to send her to an hotel—if she will not be any trouble to you, dear father——'

'Oh, she will be no trouble to me,' said Sir Vernon. 'I'll take care of that.'

'Then I think you had better let me write and ask her to stay with us.'

'Ask her!' quoth Sir Vernon, 'egad, she has asked herself.'

The letter was written, and by return of post there came a gushing reply, announcing that Mrs. Ferrers had broken the intelligence of her departure to dear Marmaduke, who had borne the blow better than might have been expected, and who was amiably resigned to the loss of his wife's society during the ensuing six weeks. Is not a modern Anglican cleric bound to imitate in somewise the example of the early Christian martyrs? Fire or sword he is not called upon to suffer, nor to fight with wild beasts in the arena; but these small domestic deprivations are a scourge of the flesh, which tend to exercise his heroic temper.

'Todd,' said Marmaduke, in a fat and unctuous voice, 'you must take particular care of me while your mistress is away. You know what I like, Todd, and you must make sure that I have it.'

Mrs. Ferrers arrived one sunny afternoon, with three Saratoga trunks, and the newest things in sunshades. She had a generally exhausted air after her journey, and declared that she seemed to have been travelling since the beginning of the world.

'The dust, the heat, the glare between Paris and Dijon I can never describe,' she protested as she sank into the most luxurious of the easy-chairs, which her eagle eye had detected at the first glance.

'Please don't try,' said Gerald, 'we went through it all ourselves.'

'It was something too dreadful,' murmured Aunt Rhoda, looking so cool and ladylike in her pale gray cashmere gown and flounced sicilienne petticoat, that it was difficult to believe she had ever been a victim to dust and heat.

She was refreshed with tea and bread-and-butter, and looked round her with placid satisfaction.

'It is really very sweet,' she murmured. 'This villa reminds me so much of the Fothergills' place just above Teddington Lock—the lawn—the flowerbeds—everything. But, do you know, Switzerland is not quite so Swiss as I expected to find it.'

'That was just what Daphne said,' answered Madoline.

'Did she really?' murmured Aunt Rhoda, looking across at Daphne, who was sitting idly by the low tea table. Mrs. Ferrers felt a little vexed with herself at being convicted of coinciding with Daphne.

'I suppose it is inevitable,' she said, with a lofty air, 'that a place of which one has dreamed all one's life, which one has pictured to oneself in all the brightest colours of one's own mind and fancy, should be just a little disappointing. It was tiresome to be told at Geneva that Mont Blanc had not been seen for weeks, and it was provoking to find the cabman horribly

indifferent about Rousseau—for, of course, I made a point of going to see his house.'

'And did you go to Ferney?' asked Daphne eagerly. 'Isn't it pretty?'

'My dear Daphne, you forget that I am a clergyman's wife,' said Mrs. Ferrers, with dignity. 'Do you suppose that I would worship at the shrine of a man who made a mock of religion?'

'Not of religion,' muttered Gerald, 'but of priestcraft.'

'But you were interested about Rousseau,' said Daphne. 'I thought they were both wicked men—that there was nothing to choose between them.'

'Voltaire's infidelity was more notorious,' replied Mrs. Ferrers; 'I could never have told Marmaduke that I visited the house of an avowed——'

'Deist,' interjected Gerald.

Hard pressed, Mrs. Ferrers was constrained to admit that she had never read a line written by either Voltaire or Rousseau, and that she had only a kind of dictionary idea of the two men, so vague that their images might at any moment become confounded in her mind.

When she had reposed a little after her journey, and had seen the contents of the Saratoga trunks arranged in wardrobe and drawers, Aunt Rhoda showed herself a most ardent votary of the picturesque. She had a volume of Byron in her hand all day, and quoted his description of Leman and Chillon in a way that was almost as exasperating as the torture inflicted by a professional punster. She insisted upon being taken to Chillon on the morning after her arrival. She made Gerald organise an excursion from Evian to the mountain village above, at the foot of the Dent d'Oche, for the following day. She made them take her to the Rochers de Naye, to the Gorge du Chauderon; to Lausanne by steamer one day, to Nyon another day. She was always exploring the guide books in search of excursions that could be managed between sunrise and sundown.

Sir Vernon, having settled himself in his study at Montreux, with books and papers about him, was just as much dependent for his comfort and happiness upon Lina's society as ever he had been at South Hill. It was out of the question that a daughter so unselfish and devoted could leave her invalid father day after day. Thus it happened that Madoline in a manner dropped out of the excursioning party. Gerald could not be dispensed with—though he more than once declared in favour of staying at home—for nobody else was familiar with these shores, and Mrs. Ferrers protested that it would be impossible to get on without him.

'You all have your Baedekers,' he argued, 'and you are only going over beaten tracks. What more can you want?'

'Beaten tracks!' exclaimed Aunt Rhoda indignantly. 'I'm

sure those pathways you took us up yesterday on the way to the Dent d'Oche had never been trodden upon except by the cows. And I hate groping about with my nose in a guide-book. One always misses the things best worth seeing. Do you think we could get on without him, Daphne?' she asked in conclusion, appealing to her younger niece, to whom she had been unusually amiable ever since her arrival.

'I think we might manage without Mr. Goring,' Daphne answered gravely, with never a glance at Gerald. She had scrupulously avoided all direct association with him of late. 'Edgar and I are getting to know Switzerland and Swiss ways wonderfully well.'

'Have you ever been to the Gorge du Chauderon?' asked Aunt Rhoda.

Daphne confessed that this particular locality was unknown to her. She did not even know what the Gorge was, except that it sounded, in a general way, like a glen or ravine.

'Then how can you talk such arrant nonsense?' demanded her aunt contemptuously. 'What good could you or Edgar be in a place that neither of you have ever seen in your lives? You can't know the proper way to get to it, or the safest way to get away from it. We should all tumble over some hidden precipice, and break our necks.'

'Baedeker doesn't say anything about precipices,' said Daphne, with her eyes on that authority.

'Baedeker thinks no more of precipices than I think of a country lane,' answered Aunt Rhoda.

'I am sure Lina would like to have Mr. Goring at home sometimes,' said Daphne. Gerald had strolled out into the garden while they talked. 'Could we not get a guide?'

'I detest guides,' replied her aunt, who knew that those guardians of the strangers' safety were expensive, and fancied she might have to pay her share of the cost. 'Gerald may just as well be with us as moping here. I know what my brother is, and that he will keep Lina dancing attendance upon him all day long.'

Mr. Goring went with them everywhere, and seemed nothing loth to labour in their service. He knew the ground thoroughly, and led them over it in a quiet leisurely way, unknown to the average tourist, who goes everywhere in a scamper, and returns to his native land with his mind full of confused memories. He had to put up with a great deal of Aunt Rhoda's society during all these excursions, and was gratified with lengthy confidences from that lady; for Daphne was loyal to her faithful lover, and walked with him and talked with him, and gave him as much of her company as was possible. She talked of Hawksyard and her future mother-in-law, of the tenants, and the villagers, the horses and dogs. She talked of hunting and shooting, of every-

thing which most interested her lover ; and then she went home in the evening so weary and worn out and heart-sick that she was glad to sit quietly in the verandah after dinner, petting a tawny St. Bernard dog called Monk, a gigantic animal, who belonged to the house, and who had attached himself to Daphne from her first coming with a warm regard. He was her sole companion very often in her boating excursions, when she went roaming about the lake in her light skiff, enjoying all the loveliness of the scene, as she could only enjoy it, in perfect solitude.

'Surely it is hardly safe for that child to go about without a boatman,' exclaimed Mrs. Ferrers, as she stood at the open window of her brother's study, watching the swallow-sail as it flitted across the sunlit ripples, bending to every movement of the water. 'Vernon, do you know that the lake is over a thousand feet deep?'

'I don't think the depth of water makes any difference,' replied Sir Vernon calmly. 'The Avon is deep enough to drown her ; yet we never troubled ourselves about her aquatic amusements in Warwickshire. I have Turchill's assurance that she is perfect mistress of her boat, and I think that ought to be enough.'

'Of course if you are satisfied I ought to be,' said Mrs. Ferrers, with her ladylike shrug : 'but I can only say that if I had a daughter I should not encourage her in a taste for boating. In the first place, because I cannot dispossess my mind of the idea of danger ; and in the second, because I consider such an amusement revoltingly masculine. Daphne's hands are ever so much wider since she began to row. I was horrified the other day at discovering that she wears six-and-a-half gloves.'

Daphne liked those quiet mornings on the lake, or a ramble among vineyards or orchards, with Monk for her sole companion, better than the formal pilgrimages to some scene made famous by the guide-books. Those excursions with her aunt and Mr. Goring and Edgar had become passing wearisome. The strain upon her spirits was too great. The desire to appear gay and happy and at ease exhausted her. The effort to banish thought and memory, and to take a rapturous pleasure in the beauty of a picturesque scene, or the glory of a summer sky, was becoming daily more severe. To talk twaddle with Edgar, to smile in his face, with that gnawing pain, that passion of longing and regret always troubling her soul, was a slow torture which she began to think must sooner or later be mortal.

'Can I go on living like this for ever?' she asked herself, after one of those endless summer days, when, in the same boat, in the same carriage with Gerald Goring, lunching at the same inn, admiring the same views, treading the same narrow paths or perilous wooden footbridges, she had yet contrived to keep herself aloof from him. 'Can I always go on acting a part—pre-

tending to be true when I am false to the core of my wicked heart, pretending to be happy when I am miserable?'

The mountains and the lake were beginning to lose something of their enchantment, something of their power to lift her out of herself and to make her forget human sorrow amidst the immensities of Nature. She did not love them less as they grew familiar, nay, her love increased with her knowledge; but the distraction diminished. She could think of herself and her own sorrow now, under the walls of Chillon, just as keenly as in the elm walk in Stratford churchyard. The wide lake glittering in the morning sun was no longer a magical picture, before which every thought of self faded. Gliding dreamily along the blue water she gave herself up to a sadness that was half bitter, half sweet; bitter, because she knew that her life was to be spent apart from Gerald Goring; sweet, because she was so certain of his love. He told her of it every day, however carefully she avoided all direct association with him: told her by veiled words, by stolen looks, by that despondency and gloom which hung about him like a cloud. Love has a hundred subtle ways of revealing itself. A fatal passion needs not to be expounded in the preachments of a St. Preux, in the moral lectures and intellectual flights of a Julie. Briefer and more direct is the language of an unhappy love. It reveals itself unawares; it escapes from the soul unconsciously, as the perfume from the rose.

Daphne was very thankful when her aunt's active and insatiable spirit was fain to subside into repose; not because Mrs. Ferrers was tired of sight-seeing, but simply because she had conscientiously done every lion within a manageable distance of Montreux. In her secret soul Aunt Rhoda thought contemptuously of the lions, biggest, lake in Switzerland and all the glory of the Savoy range. Had not those easily-reached districts long ceased to be fashionable? Her soul yearned for Bagnatz or Davos, St. Moritz or Pontresina, the only places of which people with any pretence to good style ever talked nowadays. It was all very well for Byron to be eloquent about Lake Leman or ecstatic about Mont Blanc; for in his time railways and monster steamboats had not vulgarised Savoy, and a gentleman might be rapturous about scenes which were only known to the travelled Englishman. But to-day, when every Cook's tourist had scaled the Montanvert, when 'Arry was a familiar figure on the skirts of the Great Glacier, who could feel any pride or real satisfaction in a prolonged residence on the Lake of Geneva With all those subtle wiles of which a worldly woman is mistress did Mrs. Ferrers try to direct her brother's thoughts and fancies towards the Engadine. She reminded him how the fashionable London physician had lauded the life-giving, youth-renewing quality of the atmosphere, and had particularly recommended Pontresina, if he could but manage the journey.

'But I can't manage it, and I don't mean to manage it,' retorted Sir Vernon testily. 'Do you suppose I am going to endure a jolting drive of twenty-four hours——'

'Fourteen at most,' murmured his sister.

'A great deal you know about it! Do you think I am going to be carted up hill and down hill in order to get beforehand with winter on a bleak plateau, diversified with glaciers and pine-trees? It is absurd to suggest such a thing to a man in weak health.'

'It is for your health that I make the suggestion, Vernon,' replied his sister meekly. 'You cannot deny that Dr. Cavendish recommended the Engadine.'

'Simply because the Engadine is the last fad of the monied classes. These doctors all sing the same song. One year they send everyone to Egypt, another year they try to popularise Algiers. One would suppose they were in league with the Continental railways and steam companies. One might get one's nerves braced just as well at Broadway or Malvern, or on the Cornish moors; one might get well or die just as comfortably at Penzance or Torquay. You quite ignore the trouble of a change of quarters. I have made myself thoroughly comfortable here. If I were to go to the Engadine I should take only Lina and Jinman, and you would have to take Daphne home and keep her at the Rectory till our return.'

This was not at all what Mrs. Ferrers had in view. She had taken for granted that if she could induce her brother to go to the Engadine she would be taken, as a matter of course, in his train. He was a free-handed man in all domestic matters, though he very often grumbled about his poverty; and he would have paid his sister's expenses without a thought, if he were willing to endure her company. But it occurred to her [illegible] to endure [illegible] upon her for a month's visit! The thing was too horrible to contemplate.

'My dear Vernon,' she exclaimed, with affectionate eagerness, 'if you do not feel yourself equal to the journey it would be madness to undertake it.'

'Exactly my own idea. Please say no more about it,' he answered coldly. 'I am sorry you are tired of Montreux.'

'Tired! I adore the place. It is positively delicious. A little stifling, perhaps, in the heat of the day, but beyond measure, lovely.'

After this Mrs. Ferrers never more spoke word about St. Moritz or Pontresina. She saw by last week's 'society papers' that everybody worth talking about was taking his or her pleasure in that exalted region; but she only sighed and kept

silence. The 'society papers' ignored Lake Leman altogether, nor did they ever mention Mont Blanc. It seemed as if they hardly knew that such things existed. Their contributors all went straight through. Aunt Rhoda remembered how, many years before, when she had gone through the Trossachs and had been full of enthusiasm and delight, and had gone home proud of her tour, her travelled friends had so scorned her that she had never again ventured to mention Katrine or Lomond, Inversnaid or the Falls of Clyde.

She settled down as well as she could to the domestic quiet of Montreux—the mornings and afternoons in the garden; the everlasting novels and poetry and crewel-work; Daphne and the St. Bernard sitting on the sloping grass by the edge of the water, or loitering about among the flowers. She bore this luxurious monotony as long as she could, and then she was seized with a happy thought which opened a little vista of variety.

She discovered, one sultry afternoon, that Lina was looking pale and fagged, and called her brother's attention to that fact.

'I don't wish to alarm you, Vernon,' she said, as they were all sitting at afternoon tea on the lawn, in the shade of a magnificent willow, whose long tresses trailed in the lake; 'but I believe if you don't give Lina a little change from this baking valley, she will be seriously ill.'

'Pray don't say that, Aunt Rhoda; I assure you that I am perfectly well,' remonstrated Madoline, looking up from her cups and saucers.

'My dear, you are one of those unselfish creatures who go on pretending to be well until they sink,' replied Mrs. Ferrers, with an air of knowing ever so much more about Lina than Lina knew herself. 'You are languishing—positively pining for mountain air. Everybody is not created with the constitution of a salamander,' she added, with a contemptuous glance at Daphne, who was sitting in the full glare of the afternoon sun, 'and for anybody except a salamander this place for the last three days has been almost intolerable. Dearly as I love you all, and delighted as I am to be with you, it has been only the idea of the dust and the heat of the railway that has prevented my going back to Warwickshire.'

Sir Vernon looked uneasily at his beloved daughter. He had kept her a good deal about him; he had let her stay at home to bear him company, when the others were breathing the cool air of the lake, or climbing into the fresher atmosphere of the hills; and now it slowly dawned upon him that his selfishness might have endangered her health. Rhoda was always an alarmist—one of those unpleasant people who scent calamity afar off, and are prescient of coming trouble in the hour of present joy; but it was true that Madoline was pale and languid-looking. She

had a fatigued look, and her beauty had lost much of its bloom and freshness.

'Lina is not looking well,' he said, glancing at her uneasily; 'what can we do for you, dear?'

'Nothing, father,' answered Lina, with her gentle smile; 'there is nothing the matter.'

'You told me this morning that you could not sleep last night,' murmured Mrs. Ferrers.

'It was a very warm night,' admitted Lina, vexed at her aunt's fussiness.

'Warm! It was stifling. This lake is at the bottom of a basin, completely shut in by hills,' said Mrs. Ferrers, as if she had made a discovery. 'I'll tell you what we could do, Vernon. I might take the two girls up to the hotel at Glion, or at Les Avants. They are both very nice rustic hotels, clean and airy. A few days in that mountain air would pick Lina up wonderfully.'

'Would you like to go, dear?' asked Sir Vernon doubtfully.

'I should like it of all things, if you would go with us,' answered his daughter; 'but I don't want to leave you.'

'Never mind me, Lina. I can get on pretty well for a few days, sorely as I shall miss you. I suppose three or four days will be enough?'

'Ample,' said Mrs. Ferrers, delighted at having gained her point. 'We can ramble about and see everything that is to be seen in three or four days.'

'So be it, then. Start as soon as you like. You had better send Jinman up at once to engage rooms for you. This is Monday. I suppose if you start to-morrow morning you can come back on Friday.'

'Certainly. Three days in that magnificent air will be quite long enough to make Lina strong,' replied Mrs. Ferrers, assured that in three days she would have exhausted the pleasures of a lively hotel and picturesque surroundings.

'I wish you were coming with us, dear father,' said Madoline.

'My dearest, do you think it would do me any good to have my old bones dragged up an almost perpendicular hill, and to put up with the indifferent accommodation of a rustic hotel? I am much better taking my ease here. The young men will want to go with you, no doubt.'

'If you please, sir,' answered Edgar.

Gerald Goring said never a word, but it was taken for granted that he meant to go. He and Madoline must, of course, be inseparable until that solemn knot should be tied which would make them one and indivisible for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'I WOLDE LIVE IN PEES, IF THAT I MIGHT.'

THEY had been three days at the homely, comfortable hotel at Les Avants, and Madoline was looking all the better for the fresh hill-side air, an improvement upon which Mrs. Ferrers expatiated as the latest confirmation of the one all-abiding fact of her own ineffable wisdom. It was one of the loveliest days there had been in all that delicious month of summer weather —passing warm, yet with a gentle west wind that faintly stirred the heavy chestnut leaves, and breathed on Daphne's cheek, or fluttered round her neck like a caress, scarcely moving the soft lace ruffle round her throat. It was a day on which a white gown seemed the only thing possible in costume, and Daphne and Lina were both dressed in white. It was not by any means the kind of day for climbing or excursionising of any kind, as even that ardent explorer Aunt Rhoda was fain to confess; rather a day on which to wander gently up and down easy paths, or to sit in the pine-woods reading Tennyson or Browning, or adding a few lazy stitches to the last sunflower in hand.

'You seem to go at your work with a good deal less vigour, Daphne,' said Edgar, seated at his lady's feet, on a carpet of fir-needles, his knees drawn up to his chin, clad in light-gray alpaca, and a Panama hat on the back of his head—a cool but not especially becoming costume. Mr. Turchill was not one of those few men who look well in unconventional clothes.

'The weather is too warm for industry.'

'I'm afraid those curtains will never be finished.'

'Oh yes, they will!' said Daphne, 'I mean to persevere. I may be a very old woman by the time they are done, but I am not going to give in. Lina says my life is a thing of shreds and patches. I will show her that I am not to be daunted by the stupendousness of a task. Three hundred and fifty-one and a quarter sunflowers still to be done. Doesn't it rather remind you of that type of the everlasting—a rock against which a bird scrapes its beak once in a thousand years, and when the bird has worn away the whole rock, time will come to an end? Please go on with "Luria," and try to be a little more dramatic and a little less monotonous.'

'I am a wretched reader,' said Edgar apologetically, as he looked for his place; 'but I think I might read a shade better if I understood what I was reading. Browning is rather obscure.'

'I'm afraid you have not a poetic mind. You didn't seem to understand much of "Atalanta in Calydon," which you so kindly read to us yesterday.'

'I'm afraid I didn't,' confessed the Squire of Hawksyard,

with praiseworthy promptness. 'Modern poetry is rather difficult. I can always understand Shakespeare, and Pope, and Crabbe, and Byron, but I own that even Wordsworth is beyond me. His meaning is pretty sometimes, but [illegible] beauties.'

'[illegible] your understanding [illegible] allowed to [illegible] Dr. Bradley. But I think even you learning to appreciate Tennyson and Browning; so please go on with Daphne.'

'If any [illegible] Daphne,' remarked Aunt Rhoda, with an [illegible] for the balance of [illegible] quiet [illegible] prose and a [illegible] thoroughly useful kind [illegible] you to think properly, and to express yourself correctly, instead of perpetually startling people by giving utterance to the wildest ideas.'

'I think I speak as the birds sing,' answered Daphne, 'because I can't help it.'

'The habit of right thought is a valuable one, which I hope you will acquire by and by, when you are mistress of a household: or else I am sorry for your future husband.'

'Please don't be sorry for me, Mrs. Ferrers,' protested Edgar, reddening angrily, as he always did at any slight to Daphne; 'I am so perfectly contented with my fate that it would be a waste of power to pity me.'

'It is early days yet,' sighed Aunt Rhoda. 'But I live in the hope that Daphne will steady and tone down before she becomes a wife.'

'If you don't begin to read this instant,' whispered Daphne, with her rosy lips close to Edgar's ear, 'I shall be made the text of one of Aunt Rhoda's homilies.'

Edgar took the hint, and plunged anyhow and anywhere into the pages of Browning.

They lived all day in the woods, taking their luncheon picnic fashion under the pine-trees. The two young men carved, and handed and waited for them, assisted by Mowser. They had cold fowls and [illegible] and [illegible] ham, and salad, fruit and cakes, a bottle of Bordeaux, and another of a Swiss white wine, which was rather like a weak imitation of Devonshire perry. But such a meal, spread upon a snow-white tablecloth under pine-trees, over whose dark feathery tops gleam the blue bright summer heaven, is about the most enjoyable banquet possible for youthful revellers. Even Aunt Rhoda admitted that it was an agreeable change from the home comforts of Arden Rectory.

'I hope my dear Rector is being taken care of,' she murmured plaintively, when she had dulled the edge of an appetite sharpened by that clear air.

'I hope you will all do justice to the chickens,' said Gerald,

looking across at Daphne, who sat by Edgar's side in a thoroughly Darby and Joanish manner. 'I remember once being at a picnic in a forest where an elderly fowl was made quite a feature of. My hostess fancied I was desperately hungry, and was quite distressed at my avoidance of the ancient bird.'

Daphne's eyes were on her plate, but a slow smile crept over her face in spite of herself. She and Gerald had scarcely looked at each other in all those days among the pine-trees. They had lived in daily intercourse, and yet contrived to dwell as completely apart as if the lake had flowed between them; as if he, like St. Preux, had gazed across the blue waters to catch the glimmer of his beloved's casement, and she, like Julie, had pined in the home that was desolate without love's fatal presence. It was hardly possible for resolve to have been firmer than Daphne's had been since that night at Fribourg. It was hardly possible for an honest purpose to have been more honestly fulfilled.

Mowser, waiting upon the picnickers, saw that significant look of Gerald's, and Daphne's answering smile; just as she had seen many things at South Hill and elsewhere which only her observant eyes had noted.

'Still at your old tricks, my young lady,' she said to herself; 'but Jane Mowser has got an eye upon you, and your mockinventions shan't succeed, if Mowser's faithful service can circumprevent you.'

After luncheon they all sat idly looking down at the distant lake, lying so far beneath their feet, like a pool of blue water in the hollow of the hills, or wandered a little here and there, searching out higher points from which to look down at the lake, or across to the cloud-wrapped Alps. As the day wore on the light western breeze dropped and died away, and there came the stillness of a sultry August afternoon, just such an atmosphere as that of the lotus-eaters' isle, the land where it was always afternoon.

Aunt Rhoda, who had lunched more copiously than the others, succumbed to the enervating influence of summer. The outline antimacassar on which she had been diligently stitching a design of infantine simplicity—a little girl with a watering-pot, a little boy with an umbrella—dropped from her hands. The blue lake below winked at her in the sunshine like a Titanic eye. The soft sweet breath of the pines gratified her nostrils, and that delicious sense of being gently baked through and through in Nature's slow oven finally overcame her, and she sank into a thoroughly enjoyable slumber, a sleep in which she knew she was sleeping, and tasted all the blessedness of repose.

Daphne sat on a knoll a little way below her aunt, struggling with a sunflower, heartily tired of it all the time, and painfully

oppressed by the consciousness of three hundred and fifty-one sunflowers remaining to be done after this one.

'It is like the line of the Egyptian kings,' she murmured with a sigh. 'An endless procession—too stupendous for the imagination to grasp.'

Edgar, stretched at the feet of his adored, had fallen as fast asleep as Aunt Rhoda. Madoline and Gerald had wandered off to the higher grounds. They were going to the Col du Jaman for anything Daphne knew to the contrary.

This particular sunflower now approaching a finish seemed the most irritating of all his tribe. Daphne tightened her thread, pulled it into a knot, boggled at the knot, lost patience, and threw the work aside in a rage.

'Who could do crewel-work on such a stifling day?' she cried, looking angrily down at the lake, with its girdle of towns and villages, gardens and vineyards; looking angrily even at picturesque Chillon, with its mediæval turrets and drawbridge, angrily at the calm, snow-shrouded Dent du Midi, and the dark green hills around its base.

Then, having explored the wide landscape with eyes blind for this moment to its beauty, she looked discontentedly at the reclining form at her feet, the faithful lover, slumbering serenely, oblivious of wasps and centipedes.

'A log,' she muttered to herself, 'a log. Blind and deaf! Good; yes, I know he is good, and I try to value him for his goodness; but oh, how weary I am—how weary—how weary!'

She flung aside her work, and wandered away along a narrow winding pathway, trodden by the feet of previous wanderers, upward and upward towards the granite point of the Dent du Jaman, gray against the sapphire sky. She walked, scarcely knowing where she went, or why: urged by a fever of the mind, which hurried her any whither to escape from the weariness of her own thoughts; as if such escape were possible to humanity.

She had been walking along the same serpentine path for nearly an hour, neither knowing nor caring where it might be leading her. The gray peak of the granite rock always rose yonder in the same distant patch of blue above the dark pine-trees. It seemed as if she might go on mounting this hilly path for ever and get no nearer to that lonely point.

'It as far off as happiness or contentment,' she said to herself; 'vain to dream of reaching it.'

She stopped at last, and looked at her watch, feeling that the afternoon was wearing on, and that it might be time for her to hurry back to the family circle. It was past five, and the dinner hour was seven; and she had been roaming upwards by paths which might lead her astray in the descent, one woodland path being so like another. She began her homeward

journey, walking quickly, her thoughtful eyes bent upon the ground. She was hurrying on, absorbed in her own thoughts, when her name was uttered by that one only voice which had power to thrill her soul.

'Daphne!'

She looked up and saw Gerald Goring, seated on a fallen pine-trunk, smoking.

He flung away his cigarette and came towards her.

'Good afternoon,' she said, with a careless nod; 'I am hurrying back to dinner.'

He put out his hand and caught her by the arm, and drew her towards him authoritatively.

'You are not going to escape me so easily,' he said, pale to the lips with strongest feeling. 'No: you and I have a long reckoning to settle. What do you think I am made of, that you dare to treat me as you have done for the last month? Am I a dog to be whistled to your side, to be lured away from love and fealty to another by every trick, and grace, and charm within the compass of woman's art, and then to be dismissed like a dog—sent back to my former owner? You think you can cure me of my folly—cure me by silence and averted looks—that I can forget you and be again the man I was before I loved you. Daphne, you should know me better than that. You have kindled a fire in my blood which you alone can quench. You have steeped me in a poison for which you have the only antidote. Oh! my Œnone! my Œnone! will you refuse the balm that can heal my wounds, the balsam that you alone can bestow?'

Daphne looked at him without flinching, the sweet girlish face deadly pale, but fixed as marble.

'I told you what I thought and meant in my letter,' she said quietly. 'I have never wavered from that.'

'Never wavered!' he cried savagely. 'You are made of stone. I have been trying you. I have been waiting for you to give way. I knew it must come in the end, for I know that you love me—I know it—I know it. I have known it almost ever since I came back to South Hill, and saw your cheek whiten when you recognised me; and I have been waiting to see how long this drama of self-sacrifice would last—how long you would deny your love, and falsify your whole nature. It has lasted long enough, Daphne. The chase has been severe enough. Your tender feet have been wounded by the thorny ways of self-sacrifice. Your poor Apollo's patience is well-nigh worn out. My love, my love, why should we go on dissembling to each other, and to all the rest of the world, looking at each other with stony countenances—dumb—cold, when every throb of each burning heart beats for the other, when every feeling in each breast responds to its twin soul, as finely as a note of

music to the touch of the player? Let us end it all, Daphne. Let us make an end of this long dissimulation—this life of hypocrisy. Come with me, dear; fly with me. Now, Daphne—now, this instant, before there is time for either of us to repent. We can be married to-morrow morning at Geneva—it can be easily managed in that Puritan city. Come away with me, my beloved. I will honour and respect your purity as faithfully as if a hundred knights rode at your saddle-bow. My beloved, do you think that good can come to anyone by a lifelong lie, by the trampling out of Nature's sweetest purest feeling in two loving hearts?'

He had drawn her to his breast. Folded in a lover's arms for the first time in her life, she looked up into eyes whose passionate ardour seemed to encompass her with a divine flame: as if this man who clasped her to his breast had been indeed the old Greek god, sublime in the radiance of youth and genius and immortal beauty.

'Daphne, will you be my wife?'

'I cannot answer that question yet,' she said slowly, falteringly, after a pause, of some moments. 'You must give me time. Let me go now—this instant. I must hurry back to the hotel.'

'What! when I hold you in my arms for the first time?—when I am steeped in the rapture of a satisfied love? Oh Daphne, if you knew how often in feverish dreams I have held you thus; I have looked down into your eyes, and drunk the nectar of your lips. What?' as she drew herself suddenly away from him; 'even now you refuse me one kiss—the solemn pledge of our union; cruel, too cruel girl!'

'To-morrow shall decide our fate,' she said. 'For pity's sake, as you are a gentleman, let me go.'

He released her that moment. His arms dropped at his sides, and she was free.

'There was no necessity for that appeal,' he said coldly; 'you can go—alone if you choose—though I should like to walk back to the hotel with you. I left—your sister' (it seemed as if it were difficult for him to pronounce Lina's name) 'in the garden before I strolled up here. I thought you were with your devoted lover. You say to-morrow shall decide our fate. I cannot imagine why you should hesitate, or postpone your decision. I know that you love me as fondly as I love you, and that neither of us can ever care for anyone else. Promise me at least one thing before we part to-day. Promise me that you will break off this pitiful mockery of an engagement to a man whom you despise.'

'I do not despise him—that is too hard a word—but I promise that I will never be Edgar Turchill's wife.'

'Lose no time in letting him know that. My blood boils

and my heart sickens every time I see him touch your hand. Thank God, he keeps his kisses for your hours of privacy.'

'He has never kissed me but once in my life,' said Daphne, tossing up her head, and blushing angrily.

'Thank God again.'

'Good-bye,' she said, looking at him with a pathetic tenderness, love struggling with despair.

He leaned against the brown trunk of a fir-tree, pale to the lips, his eyes fixed on the ground, where the mosses and starry white blossoms, and tremulous harebells, and delicate maidenhair fern shone like jewels in the golden patches of light which flickered with every movement of the dark branches above them. His eyes perused every leaf and every petal, noting their form and colour with mechanical accuracy of observation. His pencil could have reproduced every detail of that little bit of broken ground six months afterwards.

'Daphne,' he said huskily, 'you are very cruel to me. I am not going to let you see how low a man can sink when he loves a woman as weakly, as blindly, as madly as I love you. I am not going to show you how base he can be—how sunk in his own esteem. There is some remnant of pride left in me. I am not going to crawl at your feet, or to shed womanish tears. But I tell you all the same, you are breaking my heart.'

'It is all foolishness,' said Daphne, pale, but calm of speech and eye, every nerve braced in the intensity of her resolution. 'It is folly and madness from beginning to end. You confessed as much just this moment. Why should I sacrifice my honour and my self-respect to gratify a weak, blind, mad love? I love my sister with a truer, better, holier affection than I could ever feel for you—if I had been your wife five-and-twenty years, and it were our silver wedding-day.'

She smiled even in her despair at the impossible image of herself and Gerald Goring grown middle-aged and stout and commonplace, like the principal figures in a silver wedding.

'Why cannot you let the past be past—forget that you ever have been so foolish, so false, as to care for me?'

'Forget! yes, if I could do that. It would be as easy to pluck my heart out of my body and go on living comfortably afterwards. No, Daphne, I can never forget. No, Daphne, I can never go back to the old calm tranquil love. It never was love. It was friendship, affection, respect—what you will, but not love. I never knew what love meant till I knew you.'

'Good bye,' she said gently, perceiving that an argument of this kind might go on for ever.

It was sweet to hear him plead; there was even a fearful kind of happiness—half sweet, half bitter—in being alone with him in that silent wood, in knowing that he was her own; heart, mind, and soul devoted to her; ready to sacrifice honour and

good name for her sake: for what would the world say of him if he jilted Madoline and ran away with Madoline's sister? Her breast swelled with ineffable pride at the thought of her triumph over this man to whom her girlish heart had given itself unwittingly, on just such a summer afternoon as this, two years ago. The man who had so often seemed to scorn her, to regard her only as a subject for friendly ridicule, in the beginning of things at South Hill. He was at her feet: she had made him her slave. Her heart thrilled with delight at the knowledge of his love; yet above every selfish consideration was her thought of her sister, and that made her firm as the granite peak of Jaman yonder, rising sharply above its black girdle of firs.

She looked at him for a few moments steadily, with a curious smile, a smile which lighted up the expressive face with an almost inspired look. Her hand rested lightly on the lace at her throat, the finger-tips just touching the pearl necklace, Lina's new year's gift, which she wore constantly. It was her talisman.

'Let us shake hands,' she said, 'and part friends.'

'Friends!' he echoed scornfully, 'am I ever anything else than your friend? I am your slave. The greater includes the less.'

He clasped her hand in both of his, lifted it to his lips, and then let her go without a word.

The smile faded from her face as she turned from him. She went slowly down the hill by the winding path. Gerald took a hasty survey of the scene, and then struck downwards by a descent that seemed almost perpendicular.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'FOR LOVE AND NOT FOR HATE THOU MUST BE DED.'

When Daphne and Gerald were gone, and the fair woodland scene was empty, a third figure came slowly out of the fir-grove, a substantial form clad in a rusty black-silk gown, short petticoats, side-laced cashmere boots, and a bonnet which was only thirty years behind the prevailing fashion. This antique form belonged to Jane Mowser, who carried a little basket of an almost infantine shape, and who had been gathering wild strawberries for her afternoon refreshment. While thus engaged she had espied Daphne's white frock gleaming athwart the dark stems of the firs, and had contrived to skirt the pathway, and keep the young lady in view. Thus she had been within earshot when Daphne and Gerald Goring met, and had heard the greater part of their conversation. 'I've known it and foreseen

it. I knew it would come to this from the very beginning,' she muttered breathlessly; 'and I'm thankful that I'm the chosen instrument for finding them out. Oh, my poor Miss Madoline, what a viper you have nourished in your loving bosom! Oh, the artfulness of that anteloping girl! pretending to reject him, and leading him on all the time, and meaning to run away with him to-morrow, and be married on the sly at Geneva, as truly as my name is Mowser. But I'll put a stop to their goings on. I'll let in the light upon their dark ways. Jane Mowser will prove a match for an antelope and a traitor.'

The little basket trembled in Mrs. Mowser's agitated grasp, as she trotted briskly downhill to the hotel. 'I'll make their baseness known to Sir Vernon,' said Mowser, 'and if he has the heart of a man he'll crush that fair-haired young viper.'

Having detested Daphne from the day of her birth, Mowser now felt a virtuous thrill, the sense of a relieved conscience, in the idea that Daphne had justified her dislike. It would have been pain and grief to her had the girl turned out well; but to have her judgment borne out, her wisdom made clear as daylight, every evil feeling of her heart fully excused by the girl's bad conduct, this was comfort which weighed heavily in the scale against her honest sorrow for the mistress whom she honestly loved.

She had no idea that the revelation she was going to make must necessarily lead to the cancelment of Madoline's engagement. Her notion was that if Sir Vernon were made acquainted with the treachery that had been going on in his family circle, he would turn his younger daughter out of doors, and compel Gerald Goring to keep faith with his elder daughter. She allowed nothing for those finer shades of feeling which generally lead to the breaking of matrimonial engagements. It seemed to her that if a man had got himself engaged to a girl, and wanted to get off, he must be taken by the scruff of his neck, as it were, and made to fulfill his promise.

When seven o'clock came and the *table d'hôte*, Daphne was shut up in her own room with a bad headache; Mr. Goring was missing; and there were only Aunt Rhoda, Madoline, and Edgar to take their accustomed places near one end of the long table. A little pencilled note from Daphne had been brought to Madoline by one of the chambermaids, just before dinner:

'I have been for a long, long walk, and the heat has given me a dreadful headache. Please excuse my coming to dinner. I will have some tea in my room.'

'That foolish girl has been walking too far for her strength, no doubt,' said Mrs. Ferrers. 'She is always in extremes. But what has become of Mr. Goring? Has he been overwalking himself too?'

'I think not,' answered Lina, smiling; 'we were dawdling about together near the hotel till four o'clock, and I don't suppose he would start for a long ramble after that.'

'Then why is he not at dinner?'

This question was unanswerable. They could only speculate vaguely about the absent one. Nobody had seen him after he parted from Madeline at the garden gate. Perhaps he had walked to Vevey, perhaps to Montreux, miscalculating the distance, and the time it would take him to go and return. There was an uncomfortable feeling all through the slow protracted dinner, Madeline's eyes wandering to the door every now and then, expecting to see Gerald enter: Edgar out of spirits because Daphne was absent; Mrs. Ferrers overcome by the heat, and beginning to perceive that Swiss scenery was a delight of which one might become weary.

'I am so vexed with myself for falling asleep and letting Daphne roam about alone,' said Edgar, staring absently at a savoury mess of veal and vegetable to which he had mechanically helped himself.

'I don't see why you should blame yourself for Daphne's want of common sense,' answered Aunt Rhoda somewhat snappishly. 'It was an afternoon that would have sent anybody to sleep. Even I, who am generally so wakeful, closed my eyes for a few minutes over my book.'

If Mrs. Ferrers had confessed that she had been snoring vigorously for an hour and a half, she would have been nearer the truth.

Dinner came to its formal close in the shape of an unripe dessert, and there was still no sign of Gerald. Edgar went up to the corridor and knocked at Daphne's door to inquire if her head were better.

She answered from within in a weary voice:

'Thanks; no! I is aching terribly. Please don't trouble yourself about me. Go for a nice walk with Lina.'

'Don't you think if you were to come out and sit in the garden the cool evening air would do you good?'

'I couldn't lift my head from the pillow.'

'Then you will not be well enough to go back to Montreux to-morrow morning? We had better put off the journey.'

'On no account. I shall be quite well to-morrow. It is only a headache. Please go away and enjoy your evening.'

'As if I could enjoy life without you. Good night, darling. God bless you!'

'Good-night,' replied the tired voice, and he went away sorrowing.

What was his life worth without her? Absolutely nothing. He had chosen to make this one delight, this one love, the all-in-all of existence.

He went down into the garden with a moody dejected air and joined Lina, who was sitting in a spot where the view of the valley below and the height above was loveliest; but Lina was scarcely more cheerful than Edgar. She was beginning to feel seriously uneasy at Gerald's absence.

'You don't think anything can have happened—any accident?' she asked falteringly.

'Do you mean that he can have tumbled off a precipice? Hardly likely. A man who has climbed Mont Blanc and the Jungfrau would scarcely come to grief hereabouts. I think the worst that has befallen him is to have lost his dinner.'

They sat in the garden till the valley and lake below were folded in darkness, and the moon was climbing high above the dark fir-trees and the gray peak, and then Lina's heart was lightened by the sound of a sympathetic tenor voice, whose every tone she knew, singing *La Donna e mobile*, in notes that floated nearer and nearer as the singer came up the grassy slope below the garden. She went to meet him.

'My dear Gerald, I have been miserable about you.'

'Because I didn't appear at dinner? Forgive me, dearest. The heat gave me a racking headache, and I thought a tremendous walk was the only way to cure it. I have been down to Montreux, and seen your father, who is pining for your return. He looked quite scared when I dashed into the garden where he was reading his paper on the terrace by the lake. I was not ten minutes at Montreux altogether.'

'Dear father! It was very good of you to go and see him.'

'It was only a peep. I'm sorry you felt fidgety about me.'

'I am sorry you had a headache. It seems an epidemic. Daphne was not able to appear at dinner for the same reason.'

'Poor little Daphne!'

They were to start upon their return journey early next morning, so as to reach Montreux before the tropical heat of afternoon. They all breakfasted together in Madoline's sitting-room between six and seven, Aunt Rhoda, who was a great advocate of early rising, looking much the sleepiest of the party. Daphne was pale and spiritless, but as she declared herself perfectly well nobody could say anything to her.

They started at seven o'clock. There were two carriages; a roomy landau, and a vehicle of composite shape and long service for Mowser and the luggage. Daphne at once declared her intention of walking.

'The walk downhill through fields and orchards and vineyards will be lovely,' she said.

'Delicious,' exclaimed Edgar; 'but don't you think it is rather too far for a walk?'

'Are you too lazy to walk with me?'

'I don't think you need insult me by such a question.' On which Daphne set out without another word, waving her hand lightly to Madoline as she vanished at a turn in the road.

Gerald Goring handed the two ladies to their seats in the landau, and took his place facing them. He had a listless worn-out look, as if his pedestrianism last night had exhausted him.

'You are not looking well, Gerald,' Lina said anxiously, disturbed at seeing his haggard countenance in the clear morning light.

'My dearest, who could possibly look well in such a languid atmosphere as this? We are in a vaporous basin, shut in by a circle of hills. Down at Montreux it is like being at the bottom of a gigantic forcing-pit; here, though we fancy ourselves ever so high, we are only on the side of the incline. The wall still rises above us. At this season we ought to be at Davos or Pontresina.'

'Those are the only places people go to nowadays,' said Mrs. Ferrers discontentedly. 'I shall be almost ashamed to tell my friends where I have been. All the people one meets in society go to the Engadine.'

'I don't think that idea need spoil our enjoyment of this lovely scenery,' said Madoline. 'Look at Daphne and Mr. Turchill, what a way they are below us!'

She pointed with her sunshade to a glancing white figure among the chestnut groves below. Edgar and Daphne had descended by those steep straight paths which made so little of the distance, while the horses were travelling quietly along the gentle windings of the road. It was a lovely drive to Montreux, the town and its adjacent villages looking like a child's toys set out upon a green table: the castle of Chillon distinctly seen at every turn of the road: the hillsides shaded by Spanish chestnuts, big and old; verdant slopes mounting up and up towards a blue heaven. They passed the little post and telegraph office at Glion, a wooden hut, baked through and through with the sun, like an oven; the hotel where the children were at play in the garden, and a few early rising adults strolled about rather listlessly, waiting for breakfast; and then down by the ever-winding road, past many a trickling waterfall; sometimes a mere cleft in the rock, sometimes a stony recess in a low wall, fringed with ferns, where the water drops perpetually into the basin below, and so by wooded slopes descending steeply to the sapphire lake, past the parish church, picturesquely situated on the hillside, and by many a public pump with a double spout, and tanks where the women were washing linen or vegetables under an open roof. Some kind of industry was going on at all these public fountains; or at least there was a group of children dabbling in the water.

They were at Montreux before ten o'clock; Sir Vernon de-

lighted to have his elder daughter back again, and even inquiring civilly about Daphne, who had not yet arrived, despite the tremendous spurt she and Edgar had begun with.

'That is just like Daphne,' said her father, when he was told how she had insisted on walking all the way. 'She is always beginning something tremendous and never finishing it. I daresay we shall have Turchill down here presently in search of a carriage to bring her the second half of the way.'

'Yesterday she gave herself a headache by roaming about the hills,' said Aunt Rhoda; 'she has not a particle of discretion.'

'Do you expect her to be full of wisdom at eighteen, Auntie?' asked Madoline deprecatingly.

'I can only say, my dear, that at eighteen I was not a fool,' replied Mrs. Ferrers sourly; and Lina did not argue the question further, knowing but too well how her aunt was affected towards Daphne.

The pedestrians made their appearance five minutes later, none the worse for their long walk through fields and vineyards, and across cottage-gardens and orchards, a walk full of interest and diversity. Daphne, flushed with exercise, looked ever so much better than she had looked at breakfast, where she had been without appetite even for her beloved rolls and honey.

'I have a little business to arrange in Geneva,' said Gerald, while they were all sitting about the airy drawing-room in a purposeless way, before settling down into their old quarters and old habits. 'I think I shall take the train, as the quicker way, and then I can be back to dinner.'

Madoline looked surprised.

'Have you anything very important to do in Geneva?' she asked; 'you never said anything about it before.'

'No; it is a necessity which has arisen quite lately. I'll tell you all about it—afterwards. Good-bye till dinner-time. You must be tired after your morning drive, and you won't feel inclined for much excursionising to-day.'

'I'm afraid we've seen everything there is to be seen within a manageable distance,' said Mrs. Ferrers, rather dolefully.

Daphne was sitting near the door. She had dropped into a low deep chair, and sat with her straw hat in her lap, full of wild flowers which she had gathered on her way down. Gerald stooped as he passed her, and took one of the half-withered blossoms—things so fragile in their delicate beauty that they faded as soon as plucked—and put it in his breast. The act was so carelessly done that no one seeing it would have perceived any significance in it, or could have guessed that the hand which took the flower trembled with suppressed feeling, and that the heart against which it lay beat loud with passion.

'I am going to make all arrangements for our marriage,' he said in a low voice.

'Good-bye,' she answered, looking straight up at him.

He was gone. Her gaze followed him slowly to the door, and lingered there; then she rose and gathered up her flowers.

'I think I'll go to my room and lie down,' she said to Madoline. 'Please don't let Edgar come worrying about me. Tell him to amuse himself without my company for once in a way.'

'My dearest, I don't think he has any idea of amusing himself without you in Switzerland. How tired you look, my poor pet! Go and lie down and get a nice refreshing sleep after your walk. You shall not be disturbed till I come myself to bring you some tea. That will be better for you than coming down to luncheon.'

'I don't feel much inclined for sleep, though I confess to being tired. I should like you to come and sit with me for a little, Lina, soon after luncheon, if you don't mind.'

'Mind! My darling, as if I were not always glad to be with you.'

Daphne went slowly up to her room, very slowly, with automatic steps, as one who walks in his sleep. The dark gray eyes looked straight into space, fixed and heavy with despair.

'He is mad, and I am mad,' she said to herself. 'How can it end—except——'

Her room was bright and pretty, gaily furnished in that bright foreign style which studies scenic effect rather than solid comfort; French windows opening upon a balcony, shaded with a striped awning. The windows looked on to the lake, across the bright blue water to the opposite shore, with its grand and solitary hills, its villages few and far apart. Daphne stood for a long while looking dreamily at the expanse of bright water, and the bold and rugged shore beyond; at Chillon in its rocky corner; at the deep dark gorge whence the yellow Rhone comes rushing in, staining Lake Leman's azure floor. How lovely it all was—how lovely, and yet of how little account in the sum of man's destiny! All Nature's loveliness was powerless to mend one broken heart.

'What was it that he read on my hand that day at Fontainebleau?' she asked herself. 'Was it this? was it this?'

A steamer went by laden with people, a band playing a waltz tune. The world seemed full of thoughtless souls, for whom life meant only idle empty pleasures. Daphne turned away from that sunlit scene sick at heart, wishing that she were lying quietly in one of those green dells through which they had passed to-day, a leafy hollow hidden in the hillside, and that life were ebbing away without an effort.

'Seneca was a wise and learned man,' she thought; 'but with all his wisdom he found it difficult to die. Cleopatra's death sounds easier—a basket of fruit and a little gliding snake,

a bright pretty creature that a child might have played with, and been stung to death unawares.'

She threw herself on the bed, not tired from her walk, which seemed as nothing to the lithe active limbs, but weary of life and its perplexities. Oh, how he loved her, and how she loved him! And what a glorious godlike thing life would be in his company! Glorious, but it must not be; godlike, but honour barred the way.

'Oh God! let me never forget what she has been to me,' she prayed, with clasped hands, with all her soul in that prayer—'sister, mother, all the world of love, and protection, and comfort—teach me to be true to her; teach me to be loyal.'

For two long hours she lay, broad awake, in a blank tearless despair; and then the door was gently opened, and Madoline came softly into the room and seated herself by the bed. Daphne was lying with her face to the wall. She did not turn immediately, but stretched out her hand to her sister without a word.

'Dearest, your hand is burning hot; you must be in a fever,' said Madoline.

'No; there is nothing the matter with me.'

'I'm afraid there is. I'm afraid that walk was too fatiguing. I have ordered some tea for you.' The maid brought it in as she spoke; not Mowser; Mowser had kept herself aloof with an air of settled gloom, ever since her return to Montreux. 'I hope you have had a nice long sleep.'

'I have not been able to sleep much,' answered Daphne, turning her languid head upon her pillow, and then sitting up on the bed, a listless figure in a tumbled white gown, with loose hair falling over shoulders; 'I have not been able to sleep much, but I have been resting. Don't trouble about me, Lina dear. I am very well. What delicious tea!' she said, as she tasted the cup which Madoline had just poured out for her. 'How good you are! I want to talk with you—to have a long serious talk—about you and—Mr. Goring.'

'Indeed, dear. It is not often my lively sister has any inclination for seriousness.'

'No; but I have been thinking deeply of late about long engagements, and short engagements, and love before marriage, and love after marriage—don't you know.' Her eyes were hidden under their drooping lids, but her colour changed from pale to rose and from rose to pale as she spoke.

'And what wise thoughts have you had upon the subject, dearest?' asked Lina lightly.

'I can hardly explain them; but I have been thinking—you know that I am not desperately in love with—poor Edgar. I have never pretended to be so; have I, dear?'

'You have always spoken lightly of him. But it is your

way to speak lightly of everything; and I hope and believe that he is much more dear to you than you say he is.'

'He is not. I respect him, because I know how good he is; but that is all. And do you know, Lina, I have sometimes fancied that your feeling for Mr. Goring is not much stronger than mine for Edgar. You are attached to him; you have an affection for him, which has grown out of long acquaintance and habit—an almost sisterly affection; but you are not passionately in love with him. If he were to die you would be grieved, but you would not be heartbroken.' She said this slowly, deliberately, her eyes no longer downcast, but reading her sister's face.

'Daphne!' cried Madoline, 'how dare you? How can you be so cruel? Not love him! Why, you know that I have loved him ever since I was a child, with a love which every day of my life has made stronger—a love which is so rooted in my heart that I cannot imagine what life would be like without him. I am not impulsive or demonstrative—I do not talk about those things which are most dear and most sacred in my life, simply because they are too sacred to be spoken about. If he were—to die—if I were to lose him—no, I cannot think of that. It is heartless of you to put such thoughts into my mind. My life has been all sunshine—a calm happy life. God may be keeping some great grief in store for my later days. If it were to come I should bow beneath the rod; but my heart would break all the same.'

'And if the grief took another shape—if he were to be false to you?' said Daphne, laying her hand, icy cold now, upon her sister's.

'That would be worse,' answered Lina huskily; 'it would kill me.'

Daphne said not a word more. Her hands were clasped, as in prayer; the dark sorrowful eyes were lifted, and the lips moved dumbly.

'I ought not to have talked of such things, dear,' she said, gently, after that voiceless prayer. 'It was very foolish.'

Lina was profoundly agitated. That calm and gentle nature was capable of strongest feeling. The image of a terrible sorrow—a sorrow which, however unlikely, was not impossible—once evoked was not to be banished in a moment.

'Yes; it was foolish, Daphne,' she answered tremulously. 'No good can ever come of such thoughts. We are in God's hands. We can only be happy in this life with fear and trembling, for our joy is so easily turned into sorrow. And now, dear, if you are quite comfortable, and there is nothing more I can do for you, I must go back to Aunt Rhoda. I promised to go for a walk with her.'

'Isn't it too warm for walking?'

'Not for Aunt Rhoda's idea of an afternoon walk, which is generally to stroll down to the pier, and sit under the trees watching the people land from the steamers.'

'Shall you be out long, do you think?'

'That will depend upon Aunt Rhoda. She said something about wanting to go in the steamer to Vevey, if it could be done comfortably before dinner.'

'Good-bye! Kiss me, Lina. Tell me you are not angry with me for what I said just now. I wanted to sound the depths of your love.'

'It was cruel, dear; but I am not angry,' answered Lina, kissing her tenderly.

Daphne put her arms round her sister's neck, just as she had done years ago when she was a child.

'God bless you, and reward you for all you have been to me, Lina!' she faltered tearfully; and so, with a fervent embrace, they parted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'IS THERE NO GRACE? IS THERE NO REMEDIE?'

WHEN the door closed on Madoline, Daphne rose and changed her crumpled muslin for a dressing-gown, and brushed the bright silky hair and rolled it up in a loose knot at the back of her head, and bathed her feverish face, and put on a fresh gown, and made herself altogether a respectable young person. Then she seated herself before a dressing table, which was littered all over with trinket-boxes and miscellaneous trifles more or less indispensable to a young lady's happiness.

She had acquired a larger collection of jewellery than is usually possessed by a girl of eighteen.

There were all Madoline's birthday and New Year gifts: rings, lockets, bracelets, brooches, all in the simplest style, as became her youth, but all valuable after their kind. And there were Edgar's presents: a broad gold bracelet, set with pearls, to match her necklace; a locket with her own and her lover's initials interwoven in a diamond monogram; a diamond and turquoise cross; and the engagement ring—a half-hoop of magnificent opals.

'I wonder why he chose opals,' mused Daphne, as she put the ring into the purple-velvet case in which it had come from the jeweller's. 'Most people think them unlucky; but it seems as if my life was to be overshadowed with omens.'

She put all her lover's presents together, and packed them neatly in a sheet of drawing-paper, the largest and strongest kind of wrapper she could find. Then, when she had lighted

her taper and carefully sealed this packet, she wrote upon it: 'For Edgar, with Daphne's love'—a curious way in which to return a jilted lover's gifts.

Then she sat for some time with the rest of her treasures opened out before her on the table where she wrote her letters, and finally she wrapped up each trinket separately, and wrote on each packet. On one: 'For Madame Tolmache;' on another: 'For Miss Toby:' on a third: 'For Martha Dibb.' On a box containing her neatest brooch she wrote: 'For dear old Spicer.' There were others inscribed with other names. She forgot no one: and then at the last she sat looking dreamily at a little ring, the first she had ever worn—best loved of all her jewels, a single heart-shaped turquoise set in a slender circlet of plain gold. Madoline had sent it to her on her thirteenth birthday. The gold was worn and bent with long use, but the stone had kept its colour.

'I should like him to have something that was mine,' she said to herself: and then she put the ring into a tiny cardboard box, and sealed it in an envelope, on which she wrote: 'For Mr. Goring.'

This was the last of her treasures, except the pearl necklace which she always wore—her amulet, as she called it—and now she put all the neat little packages carefully away in her desk, and on the top of them she laid a slip of paper on which she had written:

'If I should die suddenly, please let these parcels be given as I have directed.'

This task being accomplished at her leisure, and the desk locked, she went once more to the open window, and looked out at the lake. The atmosphere and expression of the scene had changed since she looked at it last. The vivid dancing brightness of morning was gone, and the mellow light of afternoon touched all things with its pensive radiance. The joyousness of the picture had fled. Its beauty was now more in harmony with Daphne's soul. While she was standing there in an idle reverie, a peremptory tap came at the door.

'Come in,' she answered mechanically, without turning her head.

It was Mowser, whose severe countenance appeared round the half-open door.

'If you please, Miss Daphne, Sir Vernon wishes to speak to you, immediate, in his study.'

Seldom in Daphne's life had such a message reached her. Sir Vernon had not been in the habit of seeking private conferences with his younger daughter. He had given her an occasional lecture *en passant*, but however he might have disapproved of the flightiness of her conduct, he had never summoned her to his presence for a scolding in cold blood.

'Is there anything wrong?' she asked hurriedly; but Mowser had disappeared.

She went slowly down the broad shallow staircase, and to the room which her father had made his private apartment. It was one of the best rooms in the house, facing the lake, and sheltered from the glare of the sun by a couple of magnificent magnolia trees, which shaded the lawn in front of the windows. It was a large room with a polished floor, and pretty Swiss furniture, carved cabinets, and a carved chimney-piece, and a little blue china clock set in a garland of carved flowers.

Sir Vernon was seated at his writing-table, grim, stern-looking, his open despatch-box before him in the usual official style. A little way off sat Edgar Turchill, his folded arms resting on the back of a high chair, his face hidden. It was the attitude of profound despondency, or even of despair. One glance at her father's face, and then at that lowered head and clenched hands, told Daphne what was coming.

'You sent for me,' she faltered, standing in the middle of the bare polished floor, and looking straight at her father, fearlessly, for there is a desperate sorrow which knows not fear.

'Yes, madam,' replied Sir Vernon in his severest voice. 'I sent for you to tell you, in the presence of the man who was to have been your husband, that your abominable treachery has been discovered.'

'I am not treacherous,' she answered, 'only miserable, the most miserable girl that ever lived.'

Edgar lifted up his face, and looked at her, with such a depth of tender reproachfulness, with such ineffable pity as made his homely countenance altogether beautiful.

'I hoped I should have made you happy,' he said. 'God knows I have tried hard enough.'

She neither answered nor looked at him. Her eyes were fixed upon her father—solemn tearless eyes, a marble passionless face—she stood motionless, as if awaiting judgment.

'You are the falsest and the vilest girl that ever lived,' retorted Sir Vernon. 'Perhaps I ought hardly to be surprised at that. Your mother was——'

'For God's sake, spare her!' cried Edgar huskily, stretching out his arm as if to ward off a blow, and the word on Sir Vernon's lips remained unspoken. 'That is no fault of hers. Let her bear her own burden.'

'She ought to find it heavy enough, if she has a heart or a conscience,' cried Sir Vernon passionately. 'But I don't believe she has either. If she had a shred of self-respect, or common gratitude, or honour, or womanly feeling, she would not have stolen her sister's lover.'

'I did not steal him,' answered Daphne resolutely. 'His heart came to me of its own accord. We both fought hard

against Fate. And even now there is no harm done; it has been only a foolish fancy of Mr. Goring's; he will forget all about it when I am—far away. I will never look in his face again. I will go to the uttermost end of the earth, to my grave, rather than stand between him and Madoline. Oh father, father, you who have always been so hard with me, do you remember that day at South Hill, directly after Mr. Goring came home, when I begged you, on my knees, to send me back to school, to France, or Germany, anywhere, so that I should be far away from my happy home—and from him?'

Her tears came at this bitter memory. Yes, she had fought the good fight: but so vainly, to such little purpose!

'I knew that I was weak,' she sobbed, 'and I wanted to be saved from myself. But I am not so wicked as you think. I never tried to steal Mr. Goring's heart. I have never imagined the possibility of my being in any way the gainer by his inconstancy. I have told myself always that his love for me was a passing folly, of which he would be cured, as a man is cured of a fever. I do not know what you have been told about him and me, or who is your informant; but if you have been told the truth you must know that I have been true to my sister—even in my misery.'

'My informant saw you in Mr. Goring's arms; my informant heard his avowal of love, and your promise to run away with him, and be married at Geneva.'

'It is false. I made no such promise. I never meant to marry him. I would die a hundred deaths rather than injure Madoline. I am glad you know the truth. And you, Edgar, I have tried to love you, my poor dear; I have prayed that I might become attached to you, and be a good wife to you in the days to come. I have been honest, I have been loyal. Ask Mr. Goring, by-and-by, if it is not so. He knows, and only he can know, the truth. Father, Madoline need never be told that her lover has wavered. She must not know. Do you understand? She must not! It would break her heart, it would kill her. He will forget me when I am far away—gone out of his sight for ever. He will forget me; and the old, holier, truer love will return in all its strength and purity. All this pain and folly will seem no more to him than a feverish dream. Pray do not let her know.'

'Do you think I would do her so great a wrong as to let her marry a traitor? a false-hearted scoundrel, who can smile in her face, and make love to her sister behind her back. She is a little too good to have your leavings foisted upon her.'

'If you tell her, you will break her heart.'

'That will lie at your door. I would rather see her in her coffin than married to a villain.'

Edgar rose slowly from his seat and moved towards the

door. He had nothing to do with this discussion. His mind could hardly enter into the question of Gerald Goring's treachery. It was Daphne who had betrayed him; Daphne who had deceived him, and mocked him with sweet words; Daphne whose liking had seemed more precious to him than any other woman's love, because he believed that no other man had ever touched the virginal unawakened heart. And now he was told that she could love passionately, that she could give kiss for kiss, and rain tears upon a lover's breast, that from first to last he had been her victim and her dupe!

'Good-bye, Daphne!' he said, very quietly. 'I am going home as fast as train and boat can take me. I would have been contented to accept something less than your love, believing that I should win your heart in time, but not to take a wife whose heart belonged to another man. You told me there was no one else; you told me your heart was free.'

'I told you there was no one else who had ever cared for me,' faltered Daphne, remembering her equivocating answer that evening at South Hill.

'I don't want to reproach you, Daphne. I am very sorry for you.'

'And I am very sorry that an honest man whom I respect should have been fooled by a worthless girl,' said Sir Vernon. 'Give him back his engagement ring. Understand that all is over between you and him,' he added, turning to his daughter.

'I wish it to be so. I have put all your presents together in a parcel, Edgar,' answered Daphne. 'You will receive them in due course.'

'It is best to be off with the old love before we are on with the new,' quoted Sir Vernon scornfully; 'and she says she did not mean to run away with Goring, in spite of this deliberate preparation.'

Edgar was gone. Daphne and her father were alone, the girl still standing on the very spot where she had stood when she first came into the room.

'I have told you nothing but the truth,' she said. 'Why are you so hard with me?'

'Hard with you!' he echoed, getting up from before his desk and looking at her with vindictive eyes as he moved slowly towards the door. 'How can I be hard enough to you? You have broken my daughter's heart.'

'Father!' she cried, falling on her knees and clinging to him in her despair. 'Father, is she to have all your love? Have you no tenderness, no pity left for me? Am I not your daughter too?'

'Your mother was my wife,' he answered curtly, pushing her out of his way as he passed from the room.

He was gone. She knelt where he had left her, a desolate

figure in the spacious bright-looking room, the afternoon sun making golden bars upon the brown floor, her yellow hair touched here and there with gluntings of yellow light.

She remained in the same attitude for some minutes, her heavy eyelids drooping over tearless eyes, her arms hanging listlessly, her hands loosely clasped. Her mind for a little while was a blank: and then there came into it unawares a verse, taken at random, from a familiar hymn:

> 'The trials that beset you,
> The sorrows ye endure,
> The manifold temptations,
> That death alone can cure.'

'That death alone can cure,' she repeated slowly, pushing back the loose hair from her eyes: and then she rose from her knees and went out through an open window into the garden.

It was about five o'clock. There was a look of exquisite repose over all the scene, from the snow-bound summit of the Dent du Midi yonder, down to the gardens that edged the lake, like a garland of summer flowers encircling that peerless blue. It was abright glad-looking world, and passing peaceful. Far away beyond that grand range of hills lay the ice-fields of Savoy, the everlasting glaciers, gliding with impalpable motion in obedience to some mysterious law which is still one of Nature's secrets, the wilderness of snow-clad peaks and wild moraines, the gulfs and caverns, the unfathomable abysses of silence and of death. Daphne thought of those unseen regions with a thrill of awe as she walked slowly down the slope of the lawn.

'I have seen so little of Switzerland after all,' she said to herself, 'so little of this wide wonderful world.'

She went to the toy *châlet*, the dainty opera-stage boat-house where her boat was kept. There was no friendly Bink here to launch the skiff for her, but the lower part of the boat-house jutted out over the gable, and the boat was always bobbing about in the limpid water. She had only to go down the wooden steps, unmoor her boat, and row away over that wide stretch of placid water which she had never seen disturbed by a tempest.

As she was stepping into the boat, the dog Monk came bounding and leaping across the grass, and bounced into her arms, putting his huge fore-feet on her shoulders, and sweeping an affectionate tongue over her pallid face. He had not seen her since her return from the hills, and was wild with rapture at the idea of reunion.

'No, Monk, not to-day,' she said gently, as he tried to get into the boat with her; 'not to-day, dear faithful old Monk.'

The huge creature could have upset the boat with one

bound; and the little hand stretched out to push him back must have been as a fluttering rose-leaf against his sinewy breast; but there was a moral force in the blanched face and the steady eye which dominated his brute power. He recoiled, and lifted up his head with a plaintive howl as the boat shot off, the twin sails, the white and scarlet awning, flashing in the sun.

A little way from the shore Daphne paused, resting on her oars, and looking back at the bright garden, with its roses and magnolias, and many-coloured flower-beds, the white villa gay with its crimson-striped blinds; and then with one wide gaze she looked round the lovely landscape, the long range of hills, in all their infinite variety of light and shadow, verdant slopes streaked with threads of glittering water, vineyards and low gray walls, rising terrace above terrace, quaint Vevey, and gray old Chillon, the black gorge that lets in the turbid Rhone; churches with square towers and ivy-covered walls; and yonder the inexorable mountains of Savoy. For a little while her eye took in every detail of the scene: and then it all melted from her troubled gaze, and she saw not that grand Alpine chain, showing cloudlike amid the clouds, but the brown Avon and its dipping willows, the low Warwickshire hills and village gables, the distant spire of Stratford above the many-arched bridge, the water-meadows at South Hill, and the long fringe of yellow daffodils waving in the March wind.

'Oh for the reedy banks and shallow reaches of the Avon!' she thought, her heart yearning for home.

Then with bowed head she bent over her oars, and the light boat shot away across the wake of a passing steamer; it shot away, far away to the middle of the lake; it vanished like a feather blown by a summer breeze; and it never came back again.

The empty boat drifted ashore at Evian in the gray light of morning, while Gerald Goring, with a couple of Swiss boatmen, was rowing about the lake, stopping to make inquiries at every landing-place, sending scouts in every direction, in quest of that missing craft. No one ever knew, no one dared to guess, how it had happened: but every one knew that in some dark spot below that deep blue water Daphne was at rest. The dog had been down by the boathouse all night, howling fitfully through the dark silent hours. He had not left the spot since Daphne's boat glided away from the steps.

It had been a night of anguish and terror for all that household at Montreux—a night of agitation, of alternations of hope and fear. Even Sir Vernon was profoundly moved by anxiety about the daughter to whom he had given so little of his love. He knew that he had been hard and merciless in that last inter-

view. He had thought only of Madoline; and the knowledge that Madoline had been wronged—that the elder sister's love had been tempted to falsehood by the arts and coquetries of the younger sister—had stung him to a frenzy of anger. Nothing could be too bad for the ingrate who had sinned against the best of sisters. He was too hard a man to give the sinner the benefit of the doubt, and to believe that she had sinned unconsciously. In his mind Daphne had wickedly and deliberately corrupted the heart of her sister's affianced husband. Angry as he had felt with Gerald, his indignation against the weaker vessel was fiercer than his wrath against the stronger.

Mowser had told her story with truth as to the main facts; but with such embellishments and heightened colouring as made Daphne appear the boldest and most depraved of her sex. In Mowser's version of that scene in the pine-wood there was no hint of temptation resisted, of a noble soul struggling with an unworthy passion, of a tender heart trying to be faithful to sisterly affection, while every impulse of a passionate love tugged the other way. All Mowser could tell was that Miss Daphne had sobbed in Mr. Goring's arms, that he had kissed her, as she, Mowser, had never been kissed, although she had kept company and been on the brink of marriage with a builder's foreman; and that they had talked of being married at Geneva—leastways Mr. Goring had asked Miss Daphne to run away with him for that purpose, and she had not said no, but had only begged him to give her twenty-four hours—naturally requiring that time to pack her clothes and make all needful preparation for flight.

Passionately attached to his elder daughter, and always ready to think evil of Daphne, Sir Vernon needed no confirmation of Mowser's story. It was only the realisation of what he always feared—the mother's falsehood showing itself in the daughter—hereditary baseness. It was the girl's nature to betray. She had all her mother's outward graces and too fascinating prettiness. How could he have hoped that she would have any higher notions of truth and honour?

Moved to deepest wrath at the wrong done to Madoline, Sir Vernon's first impulse had been to send for Gerald Goring, in order to come to an immediate understanding with that offender. He was told that Mr. Goring had gone to Geneva, and was not expected home before eight o'clock. He then sent for Edgar, and to that unhappy lover bluntly and almost brutally related the story of Daphne's baseness. Edgar was inclined to disbelieve, nay, even to laugh Mowser's slander to scorn; but Mowser, summoned to a second interview, stuck resolutely to her text, and was not to be shaken.

'I can't believe it,' faltered Edgar, stricken to the heart, 'unless I hear it from her own lips.'

'Go and fetch her,' said Sir Vernon to Mowser, and then

had followed Daphne's appearance, and those admissions of hers which told Edgar only too clearly how he had been deceived.

The two men, Gerald and Edgar, passed each other on the railway between Lausanne and Geneva—Edgar on his way to the city, Gerald going back to Montreux. Mr. Goring wondered at seeing his friend's pale face glide slowly by as the two trains crossed at the junction.

'It looks as if she had given him his quietus already,' he said to himself. 'My brave little Daphne!'

He was going back to Montreux with his heart full of hope and gladness. He had taken all the needful measures at Geneva to make his marriage with Daphne an easy matter, would she but consent to marry him. And he had no doubt of her consent. Could a girl love as she loved, and obstinately withhold herself from her lover?

He forgot the pain he must inflict on one who had been so dear; forgot the woman who had been the guiding star of his boyhood and youth; forget everything except that one consummate bliss which he longed for—the triumph of a passionate love. That crown of life once snatched from reluctant Fate, all other things would come right in time. Madoline's gentle nature would forgive a wrong which was the work of destiny rather than of man's falsehood. Sir Vernon would be angry and unpleasant, no doubt; but Gerald Goring cared very little about Sir Vernon. The world would wonder; but Gerald cared nothing for the world. He only desired Daphne, and Daphne's love; having all other good things which life, looked at from the worldling's standpoint, could give.

The sun was setting as he approached Montreux, and all the lake was clothed in golden light. Rose-hued mountains, golden water, smiled at him as if in welcome.

'What a lovely world it is!' he said to himself; 'and how happy Daphne and I will be in it—in spite of Fate and metaphysical aid. There I go, quoting the Inevitable, as usual!'

He walked quickly from the station to the villa, eager to see Daphne, to hear her voice, to touch the warm soft hand, and be assured that there was such a being, and that he had not been the dupe of some vision of intangible loveliness, as Shelley's Alastor was in the cavern. That last look of Daphne's haunted him—so direct, so solemn a gaze, so unlike the shy glance of conscious love. Nay, it resembled rather the look of some departed spirit, returning from Pluto's drear abode to take its last fond farewell of the living.

The vestibule stood open to the road, an outer hall filled with plants and flowers, an airy Italian-looking entrance. Gerald walked straight in, and to the drawing-room. It was striking eight as he entered.

'I hope you won't wait for me,' he began, looking round for Daphne; 'I am a dusty object, and I don't think I can make myself presentable under twenty minutes. The train dawdled abominably.'

Mrs. Ferrers and Madoline were standing by the open window, looking out. Lina turned, and at the first glimpse of her pale face Gerald knew that there was something wrong. There had been a scene, perhaps, between the sisters. Daphne had betrayed herself and him. Well! The truth must be told very soon now. It were best to precipitate matters.

'We are frightened about Daphne,' said Lina; 'she went out in her boat a little before five—the gardener saw her leave—and she has not come back yet.'

Three hours. It was long, but she was fond of solitary excursions on the lake.

'I don't think there is much cause for alarm in that,' he said, trying to speak lightly, yet with a strange terror at his heart. 'Shall I get a boat and go after her? I had better, perhaps; she cannot be very far off—dawdling about by Chillon, I daresay. Those dank stone walls have a fascination for her.'

'Yes, I shall be glad, if you don't mind going. My father seems uneasy. It is so strange that she should stay away three hours without leaving word where she was going. Edgar is out. My aunt and I have not known what to do, and when I told my father just now he looked dreadfully alarmed.'

'I will go this instant, and not come back till I have found her,' answered Gerald huskily.

That last look of Daphne's was in his mind. That never-to-be-forgotten look from her dark eyes lifted fearlessly, with sad and steady gaze.

'Oh God! did it mean farewell?'

He was out on the lake all night, with two of the most experienced boatmen in the district, and it was only in the gray of morning that he heard of the empty boat blown ashore a little below Evian—Evian, where they had landed so merrily once from the same cockleshell boat, on a sunny morning, for a pilgrimage to a drowsy village on the hills, a cluster of picturesque homesteads sheltered by patriarchal walnut and chestnut trees, where looking downward through the rich foliage they saw the blue lake below.

The evening had been calm. There had been no accident or collision of any kind on the lake; the little boat showed no sign of injury. It lay on the shingly shore, just as the fishermen had pulled it in; an empty boat. That was all.

Gerald stayed at Evian, and from Evian wrote briefly to Madoline telling her all.

'My life for the last six months has been a tissue of lies,' he wrote; 'and yet, God knows, I have tried to be true and honest,

just as she tried ; but she with more purpose, yes, poor child ! with much more fidelity than mine. I wanted to tell you the truth when we were at Fribourg, to make an end of all shams and deceptions, but she would not let me. She meant to hold to her bond with Edgar—to be true to you. She would have persevered in this to the end, if I had let her. But I would not, and she has died rather than do you a wrong ; it is my guilt—mine alone. The brand of Cain is on me : and, like Cain, I shall be a wanderer till I die. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I shall never forgive myself ; or to pity me, for mine is a grief which pity cannot touch. If I could hope that you could ever forget me there would be comfort in the thought; but I dare not hope for that. You might forget your false lover, but how can you forget Daphne's murderer ?'

To this letter Madoline answered briefly : 'You have broken my sister's heart and mine. A little honesty, a little truth, would have spared us both. You might have been happy in your own way, and I might have kept my sister. You are right—I can neither forget nor forgive. I thought till this trouble came upon me that I was a Christian ; I know now, God help me ! how far I am away from Christian feeling. All I can hope or pray about you is that we two may never see each other's face again. I send you Daphne's legacy.'

Enclosed in the letter was the little packet containing the turquoise ring, with 'For Mr. Goring' written on the cover in Daphne's dashing penmanship. The hand had not trembled, though the heart beat high, when that superscription was penned.

Sir Vernon stayed at Montreux for more than a month after that fatal summer day, though the very sight of lake and mountain in their inexorable beauty, so remote from all human trouble or human pity, was terrible to him. Madoline urged him to stay. There were hours in which, after many tears and many prayers, faint gleams of hope visited her sorrowful soul. Daphne might not be dead. She might have landed unnoticed at one of those quiet villages, and made her way to some distant place where she could live hidden and unknown. Those farewell gifts left in her desk must needs mean a deliberate departure : but they need not mean death. She might be hiding somewhere, little knowing the agony she was inflicting on those who had loved her, fearing only to be found and taken home. Madoline could fancy her sister self-sacrificing enough to live apart from home and kindred all her days, to earn her bread in a stranger's house. Oh, if it were thus only, and not that other and awful fate—a young life flung away in its flower, a young soul going forth unbidden to meet God's judgment, burdened with the deadly sin of self-murder !

'Let us stay a few days longer, father,' she pleaded. 'We may hear something. There may be some good news.'

'God grant that it may be so,' answered Sir Vernon, without a ray of hope.

What of his remorse whose hardness had pressed so heavily upon his child in that last hour of her brief life, whose bitter words had perhaps confirmed the sinner in her desperate resolve, making it very clear to her that this earth held no peaceful haven, that for her there was no fatherly breast on which she could pour out the story of her weakness and her struggle—no friend with the father's sacred name from whom she could ask counsel or seek protection? Alone in her misery, she had sought the one refuge which remained for her—death; believing that by that fatal deed she would secure her sister's peace.

'His heart will return to its truer nobler love when I am gone,' she said to herself. Poor shallow soul, unsustained by any deep sense of religion, or by any firm principle; tender heart, strong in unquestioning fidelity. It was easy to follow out the train of false reasoning which made her believe that death would be best; that in throwing away her fair young life she was making a sacrifice to love and honour.

They remained at Montreux till the beginning of October, till autumnal tints were stealing over the landscape, and the happy vintage-time had begun, making all those gentle slopes alive with picturesque figures, every turn in the road a scene for a painter. It was a dreary time for Madoline and her father. Edgar was with them; called back from Geneva by a telegram on the night of Daphne's disappearance. He, like his rival, had been unweary in his endeavour to obtain some knowledge of Daphne's fate. He had been from village to village, had made his inquiries at every landing-place along the lake—had availed himself of every local intelligence; but all to no purpose. One of the Vevey boatmen had seen Daphne's light skiff as she rowed swiftly towards the middle of the lake. He saw the little boat dancing in the wake of a steamer, watched it and its girl-owner till it floated into smooth water, and then saw the boat never more.

There had been no reason for an accident upon that particular afternoon; no sudden gust of wind; no mysterious rising of the lake; nothing. In a sultry calm the little boat had last been seen gliding smoothly over the smooth blue water.

Had she rowed to the end of the lake, where the tumultuous Rhone rushes in from rocky St. Maurice, and been swamped by those turbid waters? Who could tell? The stranded boat bore no sign of having been under water.

The time came when they must go back, when to remain any longer by the lake seemed mere foolishness, a persistent brooding upon sorrow; more especially as Sir Vernon's health had become much worse since this calamity had fallen upon him, and a change of some kind was imperative.

Aunt Rhoda had gone home a week after the fatal day, though to the last expressing herself willing to remain and comfort Madoline.

'You are very kind, Aunt, but you could not comfort me. You did not care for her,' Lina answered, with a touch of bitterness.

So Mrs. Ferrers, aggrieved at this rebuff, had gone back to her Rector, whom she found more painfully affected by Daphne's evil fate than she thought consistent with his clerical character.

'I shall never look at the garden in summer-time without thinking of that bright face and girlish figure flitting about among the roses, as I have seen her in the days that are gone,' he said; 'a man of my age is uncomfortably reminded of his shortening lease of life when the young are taken before him.'

And now that bitter day came upon which Madoline was obliged to leave the banks of the fatal lake, and turn her sad face homewards, to South Hill. South Hill without Daphne, without Gerald—these two familiar figures gone out of her life for ever: the house empty of laughter and gladness for evermore! All the sweetest things of life proved false, every hope crushed, every possibility of future happiness gone from her for ever! She could imagine no new hopes, no fresh beginning of life. To do her duty to an invalid father; to use her ample fortune for the comfort and advantage of the friendless and the needy, was all that remained to her: a narrow round of daily tasks not less monotonous than the humblest char's, because she wore a silk gown and lived in a fine house. So far her prayer had been granted. She and Gerald Goring had never met since Daphne's death. He had been heard of at Evian and then at Vevey; but none of the South Hill people had seen him.

Edgar went back with them, a man so changed by grief that it would be hard for the mother, who had seen him go forth in the strength and gladness of happy youth, to recognise the haggard hopeless countenance of the son who returned to her. He had borne his trouble bravely, asking comfort from no one, anxious to console others whenever consolation seemed possible. He had tried his best to persuade Madoline that Daphne's boat had been overturned by the current, that the sweet young life had been lost by accident. Those carefully-sealed packets in the desk hinted at a darker doom; yet it might be that they had been prepared by Daphne under some vague idea of leaving

home, in order to escape the difficulties of her position; an intention to be carried out at some indefinite time.

Hawksyard in the autumn, with white vapours stealing over the low meadows at sunrise and sunset, with the large leaves of the walnut-trees drifting heavily down, seemed a fitting place for a man to nurse his grief and meditate upon the greatness of his loss. Edgar roamed about the gardens and the fields like an unquiet spirit, or rode for long hours in the lonely lanes, keeping as much as possible aloof from all who knew him. Even the approach of the hunting season gave him no pleasure.

'I shall not hunt this year,' he told his mother. 'Indeed I doubt if I shall ever follow the hounds again.'

'Don't say that, Edgar,' cried Mrs. Turchill plaintively. 'Wretched as I am every day you are out with the hounds, I should be still more miserable if you were to deprive yourself of your favourite amusement. But you will think differently next October, I hope, dear. It isn't natural for young people to go on grieving for ever.'

'Isn't it, mother?' asked her son bitterly. 'Isn't it natural for a watch to stop when its mainspring is broken?'

The application of this inquiry was beyond Mrs. Turchill, so she made no attempt to answer it.

She had been very good to her son since his sorrowful homecoming, not tormenting him with futile consolations, but offering him that silent sympathy which has always healing in it. Of Daphne's fate she knew no more than that the girl had gone out on the lake one sunny afternoon and had never come back again. The announcement in *The Times* had said: 'Accidentally drowned in the Lake of Geneva,' and Mrs. Turchill had never thought of seeking to know more. But she was much exercised in her mind as the autumn wore into winter at the prolonged absence of Gerald Goring.

'Why does not Mr. Goring come back?' she inquired of Edgar. 'I should think poor Miss Lawford must need his society now more than ever. It is natural that the wedding should be postponed for a few months; but Mr. Goring ought not to be away.'

'That engagement is broken off, mother,' her son answered briefly.

'Broken off! But why?'

'I can't tell you. That concerns no one but Miss Lawford and Mr. Goring. Don't trouble about it, mother.'

At any other time Mrs. Turchill would have troubled very much about such a piece of intelligence, would have insisted upon knowing the rights and wrongs of the matter, and of expatiating upon it at her leisure. But her respect for Edgar's grief made her very discreet; and seeing that the subject was painful

to him, she said no more about it No more to him, that is to say, but very much more to Deborah, to whom she dicoursed freely upon the extraordinary fact, delicately suggesting that as Deborah was on intimate terms with the upper servants at South Hill, she would no doubt hear all the ins and outs of the story in due time.

'I should be the last person to encourage gossip,' remarked the matron with dignity, 'but there are some things which people cannot help talking about, especially where a young lady is as much beloved and respected as Miss Lawford.'

Deborah went to South Hill on her next Sunday out, and drank tea in the housekeeper's room, where Mrs. Spicer, though unable to speak with dry eyes of Miss Daphne, was nevertheless much interested in the fit and fashion of her black gown, the quality of which Deborah both appraised and admired. But Mrs. Spicer only knew that Miss Lawford's engagement was broken off. She knew nothing as to the why and the wherefore, but she surmised, somewhat vaguely, that Miss Lawford had turned against Mr. Goring after her sister's death.

Only one of the South Hill servants could have explained the cause of that cancelled engagement, and she had been dismissed with a handsome pension, and had gone to live in the outskirts of Birmingham, with her own kith and kin. Sir Vernon could never endure the presence of the faithful Mowser after Daphne's death. 'You did your duty, according to your lights, I have no doubt,' he said, when he sent her away; 'but I can never look at you without regretting that you did not hold your tongue. You have told Miss Lawford nothing—about—that scene in the pine-wood, I hope?'

Mowser protested that she would have had her tongue cut out rather than speak one such word to her mistress.

'I am glad of that. She knows too much already—enough to make her life miserable. We must spare her what pain we can.'

Mowser assented with a convulsion of her elderly throat, which looked like a repressed sob. The pension promised was liberal; but it was a hard thing to be dismissed, to be told that life at South Hill could be carried on without her.

'I don't know what Miss Lawford will do when I'm gone,' she faltered tearfully; 'I'm used to her ways, and she's used to mine. A strange maid will seem like an antelope to her.'

Sir Vernon stared, but did not deign to discuss the probabilities as to his daughter's feelings. He ordered Jinman—who on the strength of knowing two or three dozen substantives in French and Italian, considered himself an accomplished linguist—to conduct Mrs. Mowser to Geneva, and to book her through, so far as it were possible, to her native shores. He felt that he could breathe more freely when that evil presence was out of

the house. 'She provoked me to torture that poor child in her last hour upon earth,' he thought. 'She maddened me with the idea that Lina's lover had been stolen from her.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'SENS LOVE HATH BROUGHT US TO THIS PITEOUS END.'

FROM THE REV. JULIAN TEMPLE TO MISS AYLMER.

'Schaffhausen, September 11th, 187—.

'My dear Flora,

'You ask me for a detailed account of the melancholy accident on the Matterhorn, of which I had the misfortune to be an eye-witness, and the memory of which will haunt me for years to come—yes, even in that blessed time when I shall be quietly settled down in domestic life with my dear girl, and must needs have a thousand reasons for being completely happy.

'I kept you so well posted in my movements, until the occurrence of this unhappy event made it painful to me to write about our Alpine experiences, that you no doubt remember how Trevor and I, after our successful attempt upon the Finsteraarhorn, made our way quietly down to Zermatt, by way of Thun and Vispach. Never shall I forget the calm delight of the last day's walk between Vispach and Zermatt. The distance is only thirty miles, we were in high spirits and in excellent condition for the tramp, and we had a cart for our mountaineering gear, and our knapsacks, so were able to take things easily.

'We started at six o'clock, breakfasted at St. Nicolas, and reached Zermatt early in the evening. Our road—a mule-path for the greater part of the way—led us through scenes of infinite variety, and opened to us views of surpassing grandeur and beauty. Amidst all the wildness of a mountainous landscape we were struck with the profusion of flowers which gave life and colour to the foreground, and the wild fruits which rivalled the flowers in their vivid beauty; beds of Alpine strawberries, thickets of raspberries and barberries, bordered the path, and every village we entered lay sheltered amidst patriarchal walnut or chestnut trees.

'How can I describe to you the glory of the Matterhorn, as that mighty monolith reveals itself for the first time to the eye of the traveller?—an obelisk of dazzling whiteness cleaving the blue sky, blanking out earth and heaven with its gigantic form, the one mountain-peak which reigns supreme in a kingly solitude, not lifting his proud head from a group of brother

peaks, not buttressed by inferior hills, but solitary as the Prince of Darkness, a being apart and alone. Mont Blanc overawes by massive grandeur, but I should choose the Matterhorn for the monarch of mountains.

'The sun was setting as we crossed the Visp for the last time before entering Zermatt. Trevor and I had been in the gayest spirits throughout our journey. We had rested two hours at St. Nicolas, and had taken a leisurely luncheon at Randa. We were full of talk about the day after to-morrow, which date we had chosen for our attempt on the Matterhorn, thinking it wise to give ourselves a day's rest, or at least partial rest, after our thirty miles' walk, and to leave time for engaging guides and making all necessary preparations in a leisurely manner.

'Trevor was a stranger to the district, but he had done much good work on Mont Blanc, and he had behaved so well on the Finsteraarhorn that I had no doubt of his mettle. I had familiarised myself with the Monte Rosa group three years before, and I knew the Zermatt guides and their ways and manners. We interviewed some of these gentry after our dinner, and I picked two of the sturdiest and trustiest, made my bargain with them, and told them to examine our ropes and other gear carefully by daylight next morning.

'We had a pleasant evening, sauntering about the quiet little town in the light of a glorious full moon, smoking our cigars, talking of our future prospects, of the Church, and of you. Yes, dear love, Trevor is just one of those faithful souls with whom a man can talk about his sweetheart.

'Next morning we breakfasted at daybreak and started luxuriously on a brace of mules for the Riffelberg, to reconnoitre our mountain. How grand and beautiful was the circle of snow-clad peaks which we beheld from that dark hillside: Monte Rosa on the south-east, on the south-west the Matterhorn, on the east the Cima de Jassi, to the west the Dent Blanche, to the north-eastward the Dom, and westward the Weisshorn—gigantic crags and domes and solitary peaks, all bathed in sunshine, and as dazzling in their glorified whiteness as the sun himself! We spent some hours in quiet contemplation of that sublime and awful scene gazing at that circle of Titanic peaks, which had a sphinx-like and mysterious air as they looked back at us in their dumb unapproachable majesty.

'"Is it not a kind of blasphemy to pollute them with our footsteps, to be always trying to get nearer and nearer to them, into Nature's Holy of Holies?"' I asked, carried away by the grandeur of the scene.

'But Trevor's manner of look at the question was practical rather than imaginative.

'"I shouldn't like to go back without having done the Mat-

terhorn," he said, "though the terrible accident a few years ago makes one inclined to be cautious."

'We had a rough-and-ready luncheon on the Rothe Kumm, and took our time about the descent. It was nearly dark when we got back to Zermatt. The *table-d'hôte* dinner was over, and we dined together at a small table in a corner of the coffee-room, a table near a window, that stood open to a verandah. As we took our seats we noticed that there was a gentleman sitting smoking a little way from the window. I sat facing him, and as we began dinner he asked politely whether his cigar annoyed us. This broke the ice, and he began to talk of our intended ascent, which he had heard of from the guides.

'"I should very much like to join you," he said. "We could take another guide if you think it advisable. I am used to Alpine climbing. I came here on purpose to ascend the Matterhorn, and I shall do it in any case; but it would be pleasant to have congenial company," he added, with a light laugh.

'"Pleasant for us as well as for you," I replied, for there was something particularly winning in his manner; "but you must not consider me impertinent if I say that you hardly seem in strong enough health for mountain climbing. You look as if you had not long recovered from a severe illness."

'"Do I?" he asked, in the same light tone; "I was always a sallow individual. No, I have not been ill; and I am sinewy and wiry enough for pretty hard work in the climbing way, though I have no superfluous flesh. I don't think you'll find me an encumbrance to you: but if you have any doubt upon the subject you can ask your chief guide, Peter Hirsch, for my character. He and I have done some pretty rapid ascents together in past years."

'He handed me his card. "Mr. Goring, Goring Abbey, Warwickshire."

'There was nothing of the braggart about him, and I had no doubt as to his Alpine experience, but I could not dispossess myself of the idea that he was in weak health, and out of condition for a tugging ascent: for though the approach to the the Matterhorn has been made much easier than it was in '65, when it was ascended for the first time by Mr. Whymper and three other gentlemen, with most lamentable results, it is still a toughish piece of work.

'I heard a good deal of Mr. Goring later from our landlord; he was well known in the district, and known as an experienced mountaineer. He was a man of large wealth, very generous, very good to the poor. He had been living in Switzerland for the past year, shifting from town to town along the banks of Lake Leman, but never leaving the shores of the lake, until a few weeks ago, when he set out on a walking expedition to

Italy. He had stopped at Zermatt on his way southward; had idled away his days in a listless purposeless way; now doing a little climbing, now spending whole days lying about in the woods, with his books and his sketching materials. He kept himself as much aloof from the tourists as it was possible for him to do, occupying his own rooms, and never dining at the *table-d'hôte;* and the landlord was surprised that he should wish to join our party. His story was at once romantic and tragical. He had come to Montreux with the family of the young lady to whom he was engaged. This young lady was accidentally drowned in the lake last summer, and Mr. Goring had never left the scene of her untimely death till he came to Zermatt.

'I asked the landlord if there was any fear of his mind being affected by this trouble, and he assured me that there was not the slightest ground for such an idea. Mr. Goring kept himself to himself; but he was as rational and as clever a man to talk to as any gentleman the landlord had ever known.

'This settled the matter. To make assurance doubly sure I engaged a third guide, and a young man to help in carrying tents, ropes, etc., and we set out, a little party of seven, gaily enough, in the early morning. We meant to take things quietly, and to spend the first night in the tent, or in blanket-bags, if the weather were as mild as it promised to be. We carried provisions enough to last for three days, in case the ascent should take even longer than we anticipated. We took sketching materials, a tin box for any botanical or entomological specimens we might collect, and two or three well-worn volumes of poetry which had accompanied us in all our excursions, but had not been largely read. The great and varied book of Nature had generally proved all-sufficient.

'We left Zermatt soon after five, the Lac Noir between eight and nine, and a little before noon we had chosen our spot for a camping-place, eleven thousand feet high, and the men set to work making a platform for the tent, while we took our ease on the mountain, basking in the sunshine, sketching, collecting a little, and talking a great deal. We found Mr. Goring a delightful companion. He was a man of considerable culture; had travelled much and read much. There was a dash of nineteenth-century cynicism in his talk, and it was but too easy to see that his view of this life and the world beyond it was of that sombre hue which so deeply overshadows modern thought. Still he was a most agreeable companion; and Trevor told me more than once, in a confidential aside, that our new acquaintance was a decided acquisition.

'In all our conversation, which was perfectly unreserved on all sides, it was noticeable that Mr. Goring talked very little of himself or of his own affairs. He spoke vaguely of an idea of

going on to Italy, and wintering at Naples, but rather as an intention he had entertained and abandoned, than as one which he meant to carry out.

'I ventured to say that I should have thought that, for a man of his culture, Paris or Berlin would have been a pleasanter wintering-place; but he shrugged his shoulders and declared that he detested both these cities, and the society to be found in them. "French charlatanism or German pedantry," he said, "God knows which is worse."

'There was a magnificent sunset. Never shall I forget the awful beauty of the sky and mountains as we watched the decline of that ineffable glory—watched in silence, subdued to gravity by the unspeakable grandeur of that mighty panorama, in the midst of which our own littleness was brought painfully home to our minds.

'The night was singularly mild, and we preferred sleeping in our blanket-bags to the stuffy atmosphere of a tent.

'We were up before daybreak next morning, and breakfasted merrily enough by the light of the stars, which were dropping out of the purple sky, like lamps burned out, as the colder light of day crept slowly along the edges of the eastward snow-peaks —such a livid ghastly light. I remember wondering at Mr. Goring's good spirits, which seemed by no means to accord with the landlord's account of him. Had there been anything forced or hysterical about his gaiety I should have taken alarm: but nothing could be easier or more natural than his manner; and I was pleased to think that, however deeply he might regret the poor girl whom he had lost by so sad a fate, he had his hours of forgetfulness and tranquillity.

'We made the ascent slowly but easily, our guides seeing no risk from any quarter; and between one and two o'clock we stood on the top of that peak which of all others had most impressed me by its grand air of solitude and inaccessibility. Throughout the ascent Mr. Goring had shown himself a skilful and experienced mountaineer; and there was no thought further from my mind than the apprehension of hazard to him more than to anyone of us in the descent, or of recklessness on his part.

'We stayed on the summit a little over an hour, and then prepared ourselves for the descent. There were some difficult bits to be passed in going down, and it was suggested by the most experienced of the guides that we should be all roped together with the stoutest of our Alpine-Club ropes. But this Mr. Goring negatived. "Where there is only one rope, a false step for one means death to all," he said. "It was that which caused the calamity in Mr. Whymper's descent; if the rope had not broken there would not have been a man left to tell the story of that fatal day." At his urgent request we formed our-

selves into three parties, each of the guides being roped to one of us. He chose the least experienced of the three men, and he, with this youngest of the guides, went first.

'"You need not be afraid about me," he said cheerily. "I am as sure-footed as the best guide in Zermatt.'

'The two men who were with us assented heartily to this, and my own observation went far to assure me that Mr. Goring's assertion was no idle boast.

'Those were the last words I ever heard him speak. We were all intent upon the descent, the guides cutting footsteps now and then in the ice. There was neither inclination nor opportunity for much talk of any kind. Mr. Goring and his companion moved more quickly than we did; and I began to fear, as I saw the two dark figures ever so far below us amidst the dazzling whiteness, that there was a dash of recklessness in him after all.

'This made me feel uneasy, and I found my attention wandering from my own position, which was not without peril, to those two in advance of us. Suddenly, to my surprise, I saw Goring change places with the guide, who until this moment had been foremost. I saw also in the same instant that the rope which had been hanging somewhat loosely between them a minute or so before—always a source of danger—was now tightly braced. It seemed to me that Goring stood still for a moment or two, looking down the sheer precipice that yawned on one side of him, as if admiring the awful grandeur of the abyss, then I saw a sharp sudden movement of his right arm; there was a cry from the guide, and in the next moment a dark figure slid with a fearful velocity along the smooth whiteness of the frozen snow, and then shot over the edge, and dropped from precipice to precipice to the Matterhorn glacier below, a distance of nearly four thousand feet. How the guide contrived to maintain his footing in that awful moment I know not. He never could have done it had the rope been slack before it broke—or was severed. In those last words lies the saddest part of the story. It is the guide's opinion, and mine, that the rope was deliberately cut by Mr. Goring. He could scarcely have done this all at once by one movement of his knife; but the guide believes that he had contrived to cut it three parts through, unobserved by him, in the course of the descent. I asked how it came about that he and the guide changed places, and the young man told me that it was at Mr. Goring's desire, a desire so calmly and naturally expressed that it had occasioned neither wonder nor alarm.

'His body has not been found, though the people of Zermatt have been diligent in their search. He lies locked in his frozen tomb in some crevasse of the glacier.

'A very beautiful marble cross has been erected to his

memory in the little churchyard at Zermatt. I am told that it exactly resembles one that was placed last year in the churchyard at Montreux, in memory of the young lady who was drowned in the lake near that town.

'It may interest you to know that Mr. Goring's will bequeaths the whole of his enormous fortune to the elder sister of this unfortunate lady, the testator being assured that she will make a much more noble use of that fortune than he could ever have done.

'Those are the words of the legacy.'

THE END.

LONDON:
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MISS BRADDON'S NEW NOVEL.

MOUNT ROYAL.

Opinions of the Press.

'"Mount Royal" is a very readable book, and the interest is sustained by the *denouement* being left in doubt to the very end of the penultimate chapter.'—*Times.*

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